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THE  
FROLICS OF PUCK.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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## THE SECOND VOLUME.

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THE

THE UNDERSTANDING

SANIT. 1907

THE UNDERSTANDING

## THE FROLICS OF PUCK.

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### FROLIC THE SECOND.

CONTINUED.

**THERE** was a wildness in Cardinham's manner that startled the maiden ; but natural courage, and a pride that seldom could, or would, bend to circumstances, enabled her to keep steadily to her purpose. She made no answer, but endeavoured to disengage her hand from his, an action which only made him fix his grasp the tighter, while his features were almost black with contending passions.

"Is it so ?" he said at length, gasping out the words as if with exhausted breath. "I read it in your eye—you recall your promise ; you reject me—utterly reject me. Is it not so, lady ?"

"Unhand me, sir," said Jane ; who, notwithstanding her stoutness, began to fear the worst from the violence of his passions. "I answer no questions put to me under such circumstances."

"It is not needed ; that refusal is itself an answer as intelligible as any the tongue could frame. My fate is settled. Yet one kiss before we part for ever—we have loved each other long, and should not

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separate like mere acquaintances upon a journey — Jane! dear Jane!”

In spite of her resistance, he locked her firmly in his arms, overwhelmed her with his passionate caresses, while the tears gushed from his eyes, and in the next moment plunged with her off the cliff into the sea, that was boiling on the rocks below. Unfortunately, it was a spring-tide, and the wind, setting in upon the shore with great violence, had raised the sea much above its usual level, or there had been but little danger in the fall, save what might arise from the height alone, and that was not sufficient to produce any considerable degree of peril. As it was, every wave dashed over them in foam, and, after a few minutes of cries and vain struggles on the part of Jane, both finally sank, the one senseless, and the other rapidly becoming so, among the weeds and shells that were rolling with the rolling waters. To Walter, who, though without the power of motion, had not yet lost all consciousness, it appeared as if he were already entering upon the punishment of his double crime of suicide and murder. In the few seconds of this half-existence, which resembled, more than any thing else, the state of dreaming when the mind wakes while the body is torpid, he realized the Arabian fable wherein the sage, to give the sultan a notion of infinity, plunges the crowned head into a basin of water for a single instant only, and in that brief space the monarch goes through the vicissitudes of many years. The natural inhabitants of the deep seemed, to Walter's distorted vision, to plunge and dart around him, all appearing to look upon him as a common enemy, and to forget their instinctive antipathies in the absorbing hatred of the human foe who had ventured into their recesses. The crab, increased to a gigantic size, closed his tremendous



pincers on him ; the sword-fish pierced him through and through with his formidable sword ; the shark, yet more terrible, sheared off a limb as though it had been a twig ; and the huge leviathan lashed him with his tail, blow after blow, each enough to have unribbed a stout bark. But worse than these were the myriads of monsters, at once ludicrous and horrible in their forms, that were tossing and tumbling about in the waters, filling his eyes with dread and his ears with their bellowings, till they were ready to burst with agony. And worse again than all this was the sea-incubus—half frog, half monkey—that sat upon his chest, grinning and crushing him with its weight, and with its yellow slimy hand upon the sufferer's mouth, preventing a breath to escape him, when he would willingly have sighed forth his soul to get rid of the intolerable sense of suffocation. Amid the many pains that racked him—the bruising grasp of the enormous crab's claws, the thrust of the sword-fish, the bite of the shark, the blows of the whale—this one agony he could feel distinct and separate from all the rest. It neither interfered with, nor by its predominance lessened, the torture of the other inflictions.

After the lapse of a few brief seconds, which to him had seemed hours, so much of thought and suffering can be crowded into a little space, a dead calm came over him. Sight, hearing, sensation, all that makes up the consciousness of life, had left his body. But he was not long allowed to rest in this happy state, that is, happy compared with what he had endured and was yet likely to endure on the great stage of the world, on which, as on the theatre, so few play the parts they would choose for themselves, and, of the few thus favoured, yet fewer walk through the scene so as to satisfy the spectators. The first return of life was still more painful

than its departure had been, though it had none of its fantastic terrors. The pain he now felt could be compared to nothing so well as the pain of a million of needles darting to and fro in his body, only far, very far exceeding it in intensity. Then came cold shudders alternating with burning fits of fever, and when these had in some measure ceased, and recollection had resumed its seat, he was sensible of the presence of a grave yet coxcombly looking person, who seemed to be watching his recovery with interest.

"This passes!" muttered the stranger. "The gipsy is a better doctor than the king's own physician, or else he has got a trick of his mother's art, who, I have small doubt, was a *chère amie* of Beelzebub's. Strange!—very strange!—he lays me a green leaf on the breast of one who is fairly drowned, and ready to fill his coffin, when lo and behold! the leaf whizzes and fizzes as if it had been on a plate of hot iron, and, by the time it is curled up like a piece of tobacco, the dead man is no dead man, but rolls his eyes about, as much alive, though not quite so sensible, as myself. I would I knew where to get a lesson in the art. The practice of it might prove a better fortune than any I am like to make by dancing attendance on the humours of a master, though I can keep a secret, or find a secret with any gentleman's gentleman that ever tied point or carried message."

While the confidential valet, for such he evidently was, thus communed with himself, Cardinham had fully recovered his senses, and, what was yet more strange, felt no other traces of what had passed than a lurking weakness, such as he might have experienced after a short illness. But so far from feeling grateful to the man, who, he supposed, had restored him to existence, the first use he made of his re-

turning powers was to execrate the mock humanity, which could tear him from the rest he had gained at so much expense of suffering. "It was," he said, "no better than the act of a surgeon in the inquisition, who prolongs the life of the victim only that he may go through a greater quantity of torture." At such a singular denunciation, where he had expected praise, if not recompense, the astounded valet began to think that the water, an element to which he bore no good will at any time, had deprived the poor gentleman of his senses. In this belief he endeavoured to soothe the supposed maniac, till a chance word, which he misinterpreted into a covert attack on his private ministry, fairly put him out of his polite lesson, and between fright and anger he could not help suggesting, "that, if the gentleman had so vehemently set his heart upon being drowned, there was nothing to prevent him; the water stood precisely where it did a few minutes before, and for his part he could safely promise that he would not interfere to balk so hopeful a project, for certainly if there were any one thing on earth to which a man had an indisputable right, it must be his own body." But it is not always that the most resolute is in the humour to make away with himself. However unimpeachable a man's courage, it requires some little preliminary preparation before he can launch out upon such an enterprise, and probably he is never less disposed to do so than when he is invited to do it. Even so it was with Cardinham. He answered this kind suggestion by throwing his purse at the suggester's head, and bidding him begone; but the valet, upon whom a new light broke the moment he found himself so richly rewarded, felt that he was bound to continue his office of consolation, and accordingly he hinted, that, since the lady had recovered, it might perhaps be as well he had recovered

also. At this intimation, so inconsistent is the human heart in what it fears or wishes, Cardinham uttered a loud cry of joy, and burst forth into gratitude to Heaven for having saved her, though not more than ten minutes had elapsed since he had done his best for her destruction. His more sober-minded comforter, on witnessing these new ebullitions, felt inclined to re-adopt the opinion of his madness in its full force, and this notion was not much lessened when he found himself called upon to answer a host of questions, poured upon him so fast and thick as scarcely to wait for a reply.

"How was she saved?—do you ask, sir, how she was saved?" exclaimed the valet, when he could get an opportunity to speak. "Upon my verity, sir, I hardly know how, though I assisted through the whole affair, as much as a looker-on might do. By whom? there I can better serve you; even by a gipsy, that is, a gipsy in appearance, though if he be not the devil himself, he is at least a limb of him, one of his scholars in the black art. I'll take my oath upon it before any justice in Westminster, he has as good a right to a tar barrel and a fagot as any witch that ever lamed cow or suckled incubus."

"Fool! blockhead!" said Cardinham, whose passions returned with his returning strength,—“where is she?”

The valet looked at him for a moment, then glanced his eye at the full purse, and appeared to find in the latter a sufficient apology for the ignominious epithets bestowed upon him, for he replied without noticing them.

"Where is she, sir? in the hands of the aforesaid gipsy; she preferred his guidance to mine; poor lady! if after all he should have picked her out of the sea only to present her to his friend in sable? Such things have happened,—at least so they say, and

there is something in the air of the country that makes me much more ready to believe strange stories than when I was in London. Upon my credit, sir, when I get into these wild parts I could swallow the tale of a goblin,—not meaning thereby the monkey's appendage to his hinder parts, but the existence of the goblin—as readily as the ten commandments.”

Before Cardinham could answer to this declaration of faith, which was likely to have called down from him no gentle reply, he was aware of the presence of Sir Edward ; and, unable to bear the sight of one who had baffled him in the field as well as been the cause of his doing that which would be his lasting disgrace, he turned his back on his sage comforter and strode off without uttering a single syllable. At this new freak, the latter, ignorant of the cause of it, drew a long interjectional ah ! and stared after him in astonishment, elevating his eyebrows, shrugging his shoulders, and twisting his face into the grotesque resemblance of a bass viol, as if to indicate the extent of his pity for the young gentleman's infirmity. So absorbed was he in this notion, that the voice of Sir Edward, who had now come up, made him start as though it had been a summons from one of the goblins he had been talking of.

“Why, how now, Steevens ? what is the cause of all this wonder ?”

“I crave your pardon, Sir Edward. Is it indeed yourself ? I really thought it had been—that is, I feared—”

“Yes, yes ; I understand ; you thought it was the devil come to claim his own ? Corragio, man ; the time has passed when he used to play such pranks, pouncing upon a ripe sinner as a hawk swoops upon a young chicken. He and the world are on more civil terms nowadays. But on what knave's errand

are you bent now? Has his grace a mind to add another act to the play of last night?"

Steevens, for it was no other than the Duke of Buckingham's confidential valet, appeared to be confounded at this question. He stammered out his usual phrase of "I crave your pardon, Sir Edward—last night!—I don't understand."

"Inimitable Steevens!" said Sir Edward, laughing, "I will wager that grave face of thine in a lie against the most brazen physiognomy in Christendom. But for all that, you must not hope to persuade me out of what I have seen with my own eyes and felt with my own bones. It is too much either for your impudence or the lady's either, though, if looks could have carried it, 'fore George, she might have passed for a Diana, who, as I need not tell your learning, was a damsel of unquestioned chastity; I wonder where the old Romans found her."

During this speech the visage of poor Steevens had acquired a degree of longitude that might have been envied by a would-be heir, when waiting at the deathbed of a miser. His jaw, by the process of extension, had reached his breast; his mouth and eyes were as wide open as they well could be; and the hair on his head was erecting itself with wonder.

"Better and better!" exclaimed the knight; "Burbage is an ass to it. Why, you have mistaken your vocation, man. Instead of clothes-brushing, pimping, and lying,—though I mean not to deny your skill in these honourable mysteries,—dame nature, when she made that face, was evidently thinking of an actor, and an actor you shall be. I'll speak to Henslow about it when I get to town, and we'll have you at the Fortune. But in the meantime let us have your errand. What mischief is the duke plotting now by the help of his faithful minister, Master Steevens?"

"His grace will never plot again," replied the valet, weeping, or affecting to weep, with a readiness that certainly made his grief look somewhat questionable. "My noble master is dead, cruelly murdered by a wretch of the name of Felton, as he was talking to Sir Thomas Friar."

"Murdered!" repeated Sir Edward in a tone of deep emotion, that was not usual with him on any occasion. "Murdered! where? when did this happen?"

"At Portsmouth, yesterday morning. Sir Thomas sent me off to you without delay, as being one of the duke's nearest friends; and I had got half way to London with the intelligence, when I met your secretary, who was speeding hither to you on some private business. From him I learned that you were at the Isle of Wight."

"Murdered yesterday morning!" said Sir Edward. "Why, you know yourself it is impossible; I supped with him but last night."

"Now, heavens forefend!" exclaimed the valet, all aghast. "It must have been with his ghost, for at that very time, as all Portsmouth can testify, his grace was lying in his coffin."

"Well, but you are not murdered, and therefore if I was played any scurvy tricks last night by Master Steevens, it must have been by Master Steevens in the body and not in the spirit. I am sure that's good logic either at Cambridge or Oxford. Besides, your ghosts are seldom given to joking, and the Master Steevens I speak of, was as facetious as a dull fellow could be, helping me out of the apple-tree that I might play the lover to a mistress with four legs—hi haw! hi haw! you recollect, I dare say—not to reckon some minor quidlibets; so, that all things considered, I am still of the mind his grace is alive and merry."

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"Here is a pretty piece of work!" muttered the disconsolate valet. "He is crazy! the mad gentleman has bitten him! oh! yes—I'll lay my life on it—I crave your pardon, Sir Edward, but perhaps you were dreaming, or a little,—a little vinous last night?"

"If you could persuade me that your story were true, I might go near to think so," replied Sir Edward. "But I hold by the more probable solution; and that is, that honest Master Steevens, witty Master Steevens, is telling an egregious lie, devised for him by his Grace of Buckingham, to furnish out a sort of anti-mask to the revels of yesterday evening."

"Will nothing convince you, sir?" asked the valet, in great perplexity.

"I answer with old Shylock, 'nothing that thou canst say'—I am of the Jew's nature, I."

"Nothing that I can say? That reminds me of what I had forgotten, Sir Thomas Friar's letter."

And he put a sealed letter, with great triumph, into the hands of the incredulous knight.

Sir Edward received this evidence with considerable indifference; but, as he read the letter, it appeared to make him waver in his opinion. His colour went and came, and after having, as it seemed, weighed every line and comma a dozen times over, he at last muttered—"This looks like truth, and then, too, Jane's denying last night with so much constancy! she had such a face of innocence in the matter! But that's nothing; a woman can wear any face she pleases; it costs her no more trouble than it would to put on a mask, and the one is just as good a disguise to her real thoughts as the other. By this light, it is a riddle beyond my wit to read."

"I crave your pardon again, Sir Edward, but had you not better cross over at once to Portsmouth, as well for the satisfying of your own doubts as for



the settling of other matters that may be necessary on this occasion?"

"Ay, marry will I; as the constable in the play says, 'it is the deffest way.' We can take boat at Ryde, and as the tide is ebbing and the wind in our favour, we may get there in little more than an hour. But still I would fain hope, Steevens, that this is only an invention of his grace's, who has a mind to clench last night's joke by sending me on a trip to Portsmouth. Come, come, Steevens, it is all a lie—I know it is a lie."

"Upon my honour, Sir Edward,—"

"Nay then, I am sure it is a lie; you are never so extravagant of your honour, well knowing your small possession in that commodity, as to draw upon it for a truth, which can always answer for itself."

"I crave your pardon, Sir Edward, but allow me to observe that the letter—"

"Confound the letter!—it has made a plain matter as hard to read as the Sphynx's riddle, and put thoughts into my head that are much better out of it. But via; we must not lose the tide in talking. If your news be indeed true, it is more than time I were at Portsmouth. The bloody setting of such a star is the sure sign of tempests."

While Sir Edward was making his way to Ryde, and thence sailing over to the opposite shore, the intelligence, which he so much doubted, had reached the island from other quarters, and became, to the tongues of young and old, what grist is to the wind-mill. It even penetrated to Cardinham in his seclusion, and, while it at once proved the absolute innocence of his mistress in regard to the alleged intrigue with Buckingham, it made him still more sensible of what he had lost by his intemperate conduct, for that he had lost her there could be little doubt. Of this he himself felt convinced, though the conviction

did not prevent him from visiting Clissold House, as the day declined, in the hope of being allowed to see her. He pleased himself with the idea of yet possessing a friend in her heart, which, if duly invoked, might plead more powerfully in his behalf than reason could against him ; but then to waken this silent friend it was necessary he should gain admission to her presence ; she must see him, hear him ; old recollections must be revived in her bosom ; and thus, if anyhow, a change might be wrought in the resolutions, which, it was probable, she might have adopted to his disadvantage.

It was with the beating heart of a school-boy, returning to his master's door, that he rang the garden-bell ; and, so powerful is fancy in the hours of our weakness, it seemed to give back a strange and more solemn sound than usual. He was kept waiting, too, for what he thought an unwonted length of time. Even the house dog, that came at the summons to the gate to reconnoitre, though he did not bark as he would have done at a perfect stranger, yet seemed to treat him with an indifference that was not in his ordinary habits. He sniffed for a minute at the hand held out to him, and then, without any farther symptoms of recognition, trotted back to the shade of the huge cedar, under which he had been sleeping.

At last the porter made his appearance, and if all the rest had been fancied there could be nothing of the kind in regard to him. It was impossible not to see that the old man was affecting a slow pace, far beyond the necessity of his years, which was intended to show that he was coming at the call of no welcome visitant. He marched up the long avenue with the deliberation of a mourner of a rich man's funeral, and having reached the gate, instead of making an immediate use of his key with the kind-

liness of manner that had hitherto welcomed a familiar friend of the house in Cardinham, he stood with one hand upon the lock, and with a face, which, though he spoke not, asked plainly enough the purpose of his visit.

"I may read my fate without a question in the face of this surly menial," thought Cardinham to himself. "He has his orders—she will not see me!"

The old porter seemed irritated at the delay which detained him, and beat a sort of gentle tattoo on the gate in sign of his impatience, though otherwise he moved not, but held his tall thin figure as upright as if he had swallowed one of the bars he was guarding so tenaciously. Little as all this promised for his wishes, Cardinham found himself obliged to come at once to the business that had brought him there. The result, however, was no better than he had anticipated. The gruff Cerberus informed him, with a laudable brevity, "that his young mistress was extremely unwell, and declined seeing any one, except," he added with strong emphasis, "her particular friends;" an addition which he had made to the original message from his own private stock of benevolence, with a view to its greater poignancy. Having rendered this communication, he seemed to think there could be no need for any farther intercourse between them, and marched back again with the same stateliness that had ushered in his first appearance.

There are few occasions on which we feel more keenly the insolence of menials, whether their place be in the court of a sovereign or at the gate of a private person, than when we are fallen in the world's regard. It brings home with double force the fact, which we would fain hide from ourselves, that we have so fallen, and in the case of Cardinham it had the additional sting of proceeding, as he well

knew, not from any pride of office, but from sincere devotion to her, whom he had used with unmerited brutality. He returned from his bootless effort, angry with himself for having given his mistress this opportunity of showing the world she had rejected him, and vowing that no consideration should tempt him to renew his visit, with which prudent resolve he betook himself to bed and to sleep, as soon as the fever of his blood would allow him to come to so desirable a conclusion. But the morning, when it woke him from his slumber, found him in a much more tractable mood, and full of hopes that the night might have worked no less favourably on his mistress. Instead, however, of repeating his visit in person, to which his recent experience of the rugged Cerberus offered little temptation, he seriously set about inditing a letter to Jane, that should be full of repentance for the past and promise for the future; but, simple as the task may seem to those who have never been placed in such a difficulty, it cost him full three hours, and the better part of a quire of paper before he could at all accomplish it to his satisfaction.

When the letter was sealed, and a servant dismissed with it, there remained nothing for him save to muse upon the probable nature of the reply, and to fret himself after a time at the tardiness of his messenger, who, it was like enough, having no motive of equal strength to urge him, put neither himself nor his horse to the trouble of any very violent expedition. To say that the dial-hand had never yet seemed to him to move so slowly would only be to repeat what has been said in prose and verse a thousand times before on similar occasions. He watched the progress of the lingering hands, as if his own impatience could communicate additional speed to them; then quarrelled with himself for

taking so deep an interest in the matter ; and then calculated in his mind over and over again the precise distance to Clissold House ; “ It was one mile to farmer Abbot’s—ten minutes for that, a very ample allowance for a man on horseback ; half a mile, no,—not quite half a mile to the old oak—say four minutes for that ; and two miles thence to Clissold House—another twenty minutes, supposing the rascal groom to go at a snail’s pace—altogether but little more than half an hour, and the same time back, and he had been gone nearly two hours ! What the devil had become of the fellow ? ”

Notwithstanding all this impatience, when at last the groom was seen returning, he could have been well contented to interpose another half hour between the present and the decision of his fate, which, now it approached so near, did not by any means look so promising as at a distance. This tardy fit, however, soon gave way again to a more impatient humour, like the hot fit following upon the cold in an ague fever.

“ The letter—where is the letter ? ” he exclaimed, the moment the door opened.

“ There is no letter, sir,” was the groom’s answer.

“ Well then, the message, blockhead ? what was said to you ? ”

“ There was no message,” again replied the groom.

“ What ! neither letter nor verbal reply ? ”

“ The old porter said there was no answer of any kind.”

This was decisive, and Cardinham felt it was. He abandoned himself to one of his usual fits of passion, at one time cursing his own folly, at another, with less reason, denouncing the cruelty of his mistress, and threatening, in terms that were well confined to the limits of his own chamber, to complete

the vengeance he had so imperfectly commenced. But it would be useless to follow him step by step through all the vacillations of his anger and disappointment. Day after day, for nearly six weeks, he renewed his efforts to see Jane, sometimes by letter and sometimes in person, but always with the same success, till at length, when he made what he resolved should be his last attempt, and with little or no hope of a favourable result, he was surprised by a brief cold note from his mistress, fixing the evening of the Monday following as the day on which she would indulge him with an interview if he persisted in requesting it, but adding, that it would be much better they should never meet again. He was too much delighted with the chance of seeing her at all to quarrel with the recommendation that closed the note, and instantly returned an answer, expressive of his gratitude for her kindness, and of his intention to avail himself of it on the day and hour appointed.

Three weary days had to elapse before the meeting, and when at length the time did come, he found without well knowing why, that his hopes of any good to be derived from it were considerably on the decline. He had that sinking of the heart which Shakspeare has pronounced to be ominous of impending evil; but, as the same high authority has declared that the present feeling of joy is a no less unlucky omen, it may be fairly said that one half of his doctrine neutralizes the other, like an acid acting on alkali. So, too, thought Cardinham, not indeed with any recollection of Shakspeare, with whom, as a country gentleman, he was not particularly familiar, but with reference to the popular opinion on such topics, whence, it is most probable, the poet himself borrowed his maxims on this subject, as well as other things of greater value; for,

after all, the essence of all true poetry is in the people and their beliefs.

On approaching Clissold House he was surprised to hear the sound of mirth and music from within, though why he should be surprised it might have puzzled himself to assign any reason, except that he supposed Jane, like himself, to be too much occupied with the approaching interview to think of other matters. It was no good augury either, he thought, that old Cerberus, when summoned to his gate, wore an aspect of unusual gayety. There was malice in the very readiness with which he undid the ponderous lock, and nothing very prepossessing in the sly, yet formal bow that ushered the visiter into the avenue.

"What can it all mean?" said Cardinham to himself. "This old fellow is of the true raven breed, and the very sight of him is a presage of evil as surely as though he croaked from the hollow of a tree. But no matter; I shall soon know the worst—or, the best, if all this is intended.—Psha! I will build up no more hopes, and then, come what may, I shall not be disappointed."

While he thus meditated, not very wisely, and certainly very uselessly, the grim janitor escorted him to the hall, whence he was shown by a servant in livery to a little cabinet, well known to him as Jane's own sanctum, and the place of many a happy meeting in other days, before his own temper had dropped its blighting bitterness on his prospects. It adjoined the large drawing-room, to which it opened by a small door on the right-hand of the fireplace, one of those extra modes of communication which our ancestors were so fond of, though they contributed much more to personal convenience than to the beauty of their architecture. Stout as the panels were, being at least two good inches of solid oak, with an additional



door beyond to exclude the air and rheumatism, it seemed to Cardinham that he again heard the sound of music, and again he set forth upon a train of fanciful speculations, when he was interrupted by the appearance of her who was the object of them. She was simply dressed in white, and, although much thinner than when he had last seen her, there was a satisfied expression of pleasure about her face that even the shock of the interview—and for a moment she did appear confused by it—was unable to subdue.

It was some time before either could find words or courage to open the conversation, and when Jane, who was the first to recover herself, did begin, it was with a degree of embarrassment that showed the struggle between old recollections and the feelings of the present.

“I have consented to this meeting, though I believe it ought never to have taken place ; but I have consented to it in compliance to the wishes of him who has a title to my obedience.”

“It is kindly done of your father, and is more, much more than I expected from him,” replied Cardinham, whose hopes were more raised by the matter, than quelled by the manner of her communication.

“It was not of my father that I spoke, Walter—Mr. Cardinham I would say.”

“Be not so unkind Jane, If I have faulted I have repented, and what is more, done penance for my errors. Let me be Walter to you still.”

“That is impossible,” replied Jane, “now and for ever. Do not therefore deceive yourself, but let me get through my task—it is no pleasant one—as speedily as may be. What I am going to say, is not to reproach you ; I have no right—at least I have no wish—to say more than is absolutely requisite to



let you understand me. Your late conduct I consider as having dissolved any prior obligations that may have existed between us."

"And no doubt you are well pleased to have so good an apology for following your own inclinations," said the irritable Cardinham, in whom the jealous mood was much too deeply ingrained for any consideration to subdue it for long together.

There was calmness, and even a degree of kindness, in Jane's reply.

"Your words only serve to confirm me in what I have thought for some time past, that we never could be happy together. For your own sake as well as mine I rejoice that such a union is now impossible."

"And why so? why is it impossible?" exclaimed Cardinham; "what is there to prevent it but your own will that it shall not be? And oh, Jane! if such indeed be your will, do not let me hear it—at least not now. I am ill prepared just at present to bear such a confirmation of my worst fears."

"It must be told, and as well now as at any other time. I became this day the bride of Sir Edward Devon."

"Married! Death and darkness! married to my enemy!"

"Sir Edward is not your enemy; why should he be? He knows nothing of—of our late misunderstanding."

"Speak it out! spare me not!—why should you? why should you spare me in word, when you have killed me by your deeds? Yes, Miss Clissold, killed—killed—killed me!"

"This is all folly, Walter. I only meant to say that I have not breathed a syllable to any one about your conduct on that morning, and rest assured I never will. I am still so much your friend, though I

cannot be any thing nearer, that I would suffer a great deal rather than speak what would dishonour you."

"Oh! no doubt; you were always very kind—exceedingly kind," said Cardinham, with bitterness, "and so is your Sir Edward—both very kind; ay, and very honourable to boot. It was an honourable device to gull a fool, was it not? an admirable piece of cunning to dupe an idiot, who was already blinded by his fondness for—a woman?"

"I do not understand you, Master Cardinham."

"No, to be sure not; but you understood each other well enough when he invented and you repeated the marvellous tale of Buckingham and the cottage, and—'sdeath! I shall go mad at my own folly, that could be brought to believe such nonsense."

"You wrong him," replied Jane, in considerable agitation; "there is a mystery about that affair which it passes me to unravel. I could almost believe—but no, I will not give an opportunity to your scorn by telling what I believe. It is enough that Sir Edward was the deluded, and not the deluder in that business, and firmly supposed he had seen what he said he had seen. That he could so far resist the force of such evidence as to honour me with his name, is only another proof of the nobleness of his disposition."

"Ay! is it not! Oh, he is the very pink of nobleness and perfection! a white swan among us black crows! a courtier of the newest fashion! the favourite's favourite! and, to sum up all in one comprehensive phrase, a very fit man to excuse a lady's weakness if she should find it more convenient to break her oaths than to keep them."

"And now," said Jane, not choosing to notice the insult conveyed in his last words, "I presume all is said that need be said between us—at least till we can

meet on calmer terms. I would ask you to join us—indeed it was Sir Edward's wish that I should do so—but I know in our present relation to each other it would be to invite you to a sacrifice instead of to pleasure."

"Oh! there is no need, madam, to consider the matter so nicely; nothing can be more delicate or proper. The Roman victors always dragged the conquered at their chariot-wheels, and why should not beauty do the same? why should not Miss Clissold? it is only the difference between a soldier and the daughter of a Hampshire justice—a mere trifle in the way of distinction; and as for me, I would not for the world do aught to dim your triumph."

"If you talk thus, it is high time I should leave you. Farewell, Cardinham; I part more in pity than in anger."

"Stay!"

"I have staid too long already, since it seems I have only staid to be insulted."

"Yet one word, Jane—Lady Devon—I accept your invitation. No," he muttered to himself, "she shall not carry it off thus. I will show her that I reckon as lightly of her love as she does of mine; the world shall not see that I was the rejected one. No, no; the mockers shall be on my side, and if—yes, that is still worth something—if I can throw a shade upon her fame—make the world fancy I flung away that which was not worthy my having—'Sdeath! what a villain am I become! You were right, Jane, very right; I am not worthy of you."

Before the bride could reply to this new current of passion, Sir Edward rushed into the room, exclaiming, "Where are you, Jane? you are missing the rarest sight!—What! my brave enemy!—but I

hope my enemy no longer—Jane, you should make us known to each other, and yet, I believe, it is hardly requisite. When two cavaliers have crossed their swords, and have the luck to survive the ceremony, they should want no better introduction.”

Thus saying, he took, rather than received, the hand of Cardinham, and that, too, with so much friendly warmth, that the latter could not do otherwise than signify his acquiescence, though the terms of grace came coldly from his lips, and would not have come at all but from a strong feeling of pride, which urged him to hide, as far as he could do so, the bitterness of his disappointment. Sir Edward gave an almost imperceptible shrug of his shoulder, as if deeming it useless to strive with so perverse a temper, but still his natural good-humour, and the earnest injunction previously laid upon him by his bride, induced him to persist in his efforts to conciliate his moody rival.

“I trust,” he said, “that Lady Devon has persuaded you to join our party; if not, you must allow me to prevail upon you. It would be a scandal to our good name, if so old a friend of the family should be absent on such an occasion.”

Cardinham bowed coldly in acknowledgment of the compliment.

“I am glad to have won your consent,” continued Sir Edward; “you had lost a sight else worth all the frolics of a court-festival ten times over. By Saint Paul, and Saint Peter to boot, it almost makes me believe in your goblin, Jane,—your Puck. Marry, as Ophelia says—or is it not Hamlet?—‘we know not what we may come to’—Those are not the very words, but they run much to that tune.”

“Do not speak of the elf!” said Jane, with a slight shudder.

“Why not, ma belle? If Will Shakspeare have told us truth—though I must say he has a mad fancy of his own—he’ll make you a world, as a Frenchman does a dinner, out of a lettuce-leaf, or even nothing—but, if for once he has been a true man, your goblin is a very honest goblin—joker-general and prime minister to King Oberon,—with no more harm in him than goes to a Christmas-evening’s frolic. ’Fore George, if the little gentleman be among the rebus apparentibus, I should mightily like to see him. It would be a sight to talk of.”

While thus discussing the merits of Puck, he had led, or, it might rather be said, dragged Cardinham into the midst of the drawing-room, so passive was the latter in the hands of his sudden friend. The fact is, that the very excess of his passions had exhausted in him for the moment all powers of volition, and he floated onward, like the wreck of some goodly vessel, which, having lost sails, mast, and rudder, drives heavily along at the impulse of tide and current. Even the frank reception that he met with from the humorous old justice failed to thaw the ice that was about his heart.

But there was one sight which attracted his attention in spite of this torpor of his faculties. This was a procession of children, boys and girls, in pairs, the eldest not more than nine years old, and all no less remarkable for personal beauty than for their rich dresses, and the splendid presents which each carried in a light silver basket of the finest fillagree work. They were about forty in number, and danced, or rather glided round the room, so buoyant was their step, to an airy, fantastic measure, that was played by musicians apparently in the adjoining apartment, though, as the door stood ajar, they were invisible to the company, who were mightily divided in their opinions as to the origin of this pretty

pageant. The elderly dames attributed the invention to the justice, and marvelled that he should fling away his money on such fooleries; whereupon they turned with renewed vigour to the cards, which they had laid aside on the first irruption of the tiny dancers. The young ladies deemed it a contrivance of Sir Edward's to surprise his bride, and seemed to wish that they could change places with her, while one of their party, a great naturalist and profound calculator, set herself seriously to consider how the knight could have found so many pretty children. Some very young misses hinted their doubts of the procession having come from Puck-pool, and were in momentary expectation that the whole pageant would melt away in a shower; but no one appeared to notice their speculations, except Jane herself, who had evidently become a convert to the elfin faith since the late occurrences. She whispered something to Sir Edward, of which those nearest to her could only catch the words,—“Buckingham—cottage,—the elf”—and, whatever her communication, he looked much graver than he had ever done in the days of his single blessedness.

The little party, having thrice made the round of the room, drew up in a semicircle about Jane and the knight, upon which the music ceased, and each of the children in turn stepped forward, and, gracefully sinking on one knee, presented his basket to the bride. When all had successively made their offerings and retired, the music gave a long triumphant flourish, and, on its dying away, a general murmur of surprise and admiration went round the room at the sudden appearance of a female in an elegant but fantastic attire, that, without being precisely Eastern, had yet more affinity to the East than to any European habit. She was closely veiled, yet many fancied, though her form was much more slender,

and scarcely exceeding the usual height of a girl of fourteen, that they saw a striking resemblance in her face to Jane, such only as is supposed to exist between twins of the same birth. Others said she was more like the spirit of Puck-pool. But whoever, or whatever she might be, mortal or fairy, she passed on unquestioned of any one, and, kneeling to Sir Edward, presented to him his ring, that very ring which he had given, as he supposed, to Jane in the cottage. He turned with it to his bride, who, uttering a murmured cry of wonder, held out her hand, and there, on her finger, was the exact counterpart of it, so nicely similar that it was impossible for the quickest eye to distinguish one from the other. Before Jane could recover from the surprise of this circumstance, the music had struck up again, and the young maskers had filed off, with the strange lady at their head, in the same order in which they entered.

“It was the lady of the cottage!” said Sir Edward.

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The experienced reader will have long ago anticipated that it was no other than his old friend Puck, who played the part of Buckingham, and conjured up, by the help of his brother sprites, those various illusions down to the final chapter of the nuptial procession, inclusive, which had so completely put at fault all the sagacity of Sir Edward Devon. Not to give the tricky spirit more credit than fairly belongs to him, he had no other nor better object in this prank than the gratifying of his own irresistible propensity to fun and frolic; and though he was the cause of justice being eventually distributed with as much accuracy as Rhymer, or

any other critic of the same school, would fain lay down as the legitimate end of tragedy, it must not be imagined that he set out with any such intention. There was, however, kindness at the bottom of his disposition in spite of all these mad freaks, as was shown in his parting gifts to the bride and bridegroom.

As to himself, it may be said that he had added little to the chapter of his knowledge of woman, and that little was chiefly of the negative kind, serving rather to call in question what he had already learned than to enlarge his stock of information. He did not feel quite so certain as he had done a few weeks before that a woman preferred her lover to all other considerations, and he again deferred his visit to the fairy queen, till he could come to something more conclusive. This resolution involved him in many adventures, some grave enough, but for the most part ludicrous, for it was not in his nature to work serious evil, however he might delight in mischief.



## THE FROLICS OF PUCK.

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### FROLIC THE THIRD.

# THE FRODO OF FLORE

FRODO THE FLORE

## FROLIC THE THIRD.

### THE UNDERCLIFF.

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#### CHAPTER I.

Riot sets up sails,  
And like a desperate unskilled mariner,  
Drives your unsteady fortunes on the point  
Of wrack inevitable.

OLD FORTUNATUS.

ALFRED SOMERTON had been disinherited by his father, a wealthy painter ; and in consequence, at the age of twenty-one, from having been an Oxford student, he found himself in the Isle of Wight, the humble tenant of an humble cottage, growing poorer and poorer every day, and with the not very distant prospect of ending all his troubles by starvation. Many a man, so circumstanced, would have betaken himself to some useful, though mechanic, occupation ; not so poor Alfred ; the devil of pride—the silliest of all devils—had gotten possession of his pineal gland, and he would say to his advisers,—“ It’s no use talking ; I cannot stand under a wooden pent-house, with a bare pate and blue nose, crying to the passers-by ‘ What do you lack, ladies ? what do you lack ? ’—a gentleman I was born, and a gentleman I will die, though my coffin should be brought from the workhouse.”

What the faults of the unlucky scant o' grace were at college had never been distinctly made out ; his father, a hypocritical, purse-proud parvenu, with as much vanity as ignorance, and as much ignorance as meanness, always protested they were so numerous it was not worth while to stop and pick out any particular enormity. At all events there were some twenty points of difference between them, any one of which would be quite sufficient, as the world goes, to produce eternal hatred. The catalogue in brief abstract might stand thus : the father was a thin vinegar-faced old fellow, not very unlike a walking-stick with a head carved on the top of it,—the son was a somewhat lusty, laughing companion, with a propensity to satire, but meaning harm to no one ; the father hated the whole race of womankind, and never was so happy as when he could hunt out their peccadilloes and publish them to the world, a propensity in which he could indulge with the less danger from being too old to be horse-whipped,—the son, per contra, as a merchant would phrase it, was even too blind an idolater of the sex, and would have gone a barefooted pilgrimage to the Land's End at a wink from the first pair of bright eyes that had deemed it worth while to send him there ; the father held painting to be the first of arts, and himself the first of painters,—the son agreed to neither of these axioms, and, less prudent than the barber of King Midas, instead of whispering away the burthen of his secret to the bulrushes, he must needs tell all whom it did or did not concern of the painter having asses' ears, and to those ears so agreeable a criticism was not long in travelling ; then again the old man abhorred music as if it had been one of the seven deadly sins, and himself a saint of the first water,—the son, still following the same rule of contradiction, sat fiddling and fluting the whole day

long, much to his own satisfaction and the annoyance of his worthy progenitor, upon whose sensorium the mewing of cats at midnight could not have grated more noxiously.

Here were points enough in all conscience for any father to detest his son upon, and accordingly Sir Joseph did detest his wild slip with all his heart and soul; and one rainy day, when his bile was more acrid than usual, he thrust forth Master Alfred into the world to sink or swim as best he might. The result was that the disinherited lost all energy, and sank into a confirmed toper, to the great delight of his tender parent, who prided himself not a little on this realization of his prophecies. A passion for a beautiful and virtuous girl, the daughter of the village-surgeon, staid him for a little while in his downward course; but even her influence was unable to cure him of this all-engrossing propensity.

Having thus described the principal person of our drama, it is time to ring up the curtain, and show him as he sat in his cottage on one bleak autumnal evening. On the hearth burnt a scanty wood-fire, the produce of some recent wreck, for at that time, and even up to the reign of the second Charles, the use of coals was hardly known in England. In the opposite nook of the chimney sat perched upon a rickety tripod David Gaston, his favourite crony,—or ningle, as he called him in the quaint phraseology of the age, when as yet the strong, racy language of our island had not been diluted by the infusion of French feebleness. It was late, and the wind was whistling shrilly about the house-top, but still Master Alfred was loath to part with his boon companion while a single drop of brandy remained in the flagon, and when the latter made a show of rising, he was peremptory for his remaining where he was.

“Passion o’ my heart ! you budge not a foot till the brandy’s fairly out, and there’s yet another glass ; so, fill : here’s to the health of my charming Marian, and may she find a better husband than I am like to prove.”

“Marry, and amen, sweet ningle,” replied the literal David ; “it’s a kind and a loving wish ; I hope she may.”

“You are a blockhead,” cried Alfred, in high chafe at this acceptance of what he had intended more sentimentally than truly ; “you are a blockhead—an ass—a ninnyhammer,—as I have told you scores of times.”

“Ay, that you have,” replied David, “and scores to them, if telling would mend the matter.”

“But it never will, David ; you are one of those who don’t know a lark from a madge-owlet ; so finish your glass, and say no more about it.”

This advice was too much to David’s taste to be neglected. He mixed his grog, sipped with the minuteness of a man who knows it is his last glass, and filled up the intervals with smoking. After a few minutes thus genially employed, Alf suddenly turned upon him, and abruptly asked, “If you could have three wishes from any kind fairy, what should they be ?”

“My first,” said David, readily enough, “should be oceans of punch.”

“And your second ?”

“A handsome goblet to drink it out of.”

“But your third ?”

“My third ?” said David, in great doubt—“My third ?—why, more punch.”

Again there was a pause, during which the boon companions continued to smoke with uncommon vigour. At length Alf said, “Do you believe in these stories they tell about Puck ?”

"To be sure I do," replied David ; " why should I doubt them ? more by token, I have found an elf-treasure close by Puck-pool."

" What is it, ningle ? let us see your treasure-trove."

David dived down into a pocket, which, like Elden Hole, appeared to be fathomless, and after much fishing brought up a stone ring of a deep blue colour. It seemed to be a composition of glass, about half as wide as a finger-ring, but much thicker ; on the middle of the rim it was enamelled with three equidistant white annulets, the circumference of the rim being about three inches. At the first glimpse of it, his companion exclaimed, " Why it is a *Naidr*—a snake-stone, or adder-stone, as the Welchmen call it. I have seen them too in Cornwall, where the people say, and you may believe them if you choose, that they are produced by the snakes breathing upon a rod of hazel. But what are you about, man ? don't fling it from you as though you had got live charcoal between your fingers ; it's a curiosity at any rate ; and you can try if it be a charm, as they will tell you it is, against poison."

" Why now, only think !"

" Yes ; if a dog or horse has been poisoned, give him a dose of water in which the snake-stone has been immersed, and he will get sound again without the help of pill or potion."

David stared at him as if the eyes would start from his huge head.

" Well—what's the booby gaping at ?" said Alfred.

" I tell you what it is, Master Alf ; you have cut your leg—you are drunk."

" I drunk ?" retorted Alfred ; " I should like to know with what ; not with one poor pint of brandy, I hope, and that too qualified with water enough to float a herring-buss."

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"You must be dagged, however."

"Sober as a May-morning with a gallon of dew upon her lips. Why, man, you don't know these Cornish choughs; they believe as firmly in their snakes as you do in Puck, and it's a common talk among them, that the tribe meet at Midsummer-eve in companies to talk over their affairs, I suppose, or it may be to choose king and queen for the next twelvemonth."

"Snakes!" cried David, contemptuously; "who ever heard of snakes talking, poor dumb devils? Puck's another matter; he's a real downright, substantial fairy, and has lived among our hills ever since the island was an island."

"So you are always telling me, David, but I can never get a sight of him; I wish I could. Passion o' my heart, I would coax something out of the merry little spirit, I warrant me."

"Much better not," replied David; "my grandame used to tell us youngsters that no good ever came of him or his gifts, though it is well not to affront him either. You have heard of the trick he played the two cavaliers!"

"Not I; what is it?"

"I don't much like talking of his pranks at this hour, for he can be as mischievous as he is funny, to the full; however, faint heart never won fair lady, so if you have a mind to listen I am in the mood to tell."

"Tell on then," said Alfred, "and look your tale be not longer than my patience."

"There was once two cousins—"

"Plague upon it, man, don't begin in that fashion; it's so like Mother Bunch, I shall never be able to believe a syllable."

"Well then, I'll try it another way. Two young officers came to the island—"



"That sounds better."

"By the knocking Nic'las, I shall never get on if you stop me at every other word. The cavaliers had heard much talk of Puck, and one day the elder,—we'll call him John, for I can't recollect his real name—"

"I'll be damned if you call him any such thing," exclaimed Alf, hastily; "it's a low, vulgar name, only fit for a serving-man. Call him Albert, and his younger cousin, Edgar."

"But his cousin's name was not Edgar; it was Joseph; I remember that well enough."

"No matter; he shall be Edgar notwithstanding; none but a blockhead, like yourself, David, would ever think of christening his hero Joseph; you might as well call him Jehosaphat, or dress him in a parson's wig and surplice."

"Well then, Edgar said to Albert;—no, Albert said to Edgar;—I never shall get on if you don't let me call them John and Joseph."

"I tell you, no; it must be Albert and Edgar."

"If it must,—though I hardly think I shall manage it well,—Albert, said to Edgar—"

But the tale will be shorter, and not perhaps worse in other respects, if we tell it for honest David, who, however sententious in conversation, was apt from the same lack of words to be exceedingly lengthy in his narrations.

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#### DAVID'S TALE.

There are few spots more truly beautiful than the coast-line forming the southern part of the Isle of Wight, and extending from Shankling to Black-Gang

Chine, a distance of about twelve or fourteen miles, known under the general name of the Undercliff. In the neighbourhood of Bonchurch the landscape is a singular mixture of the barren and the fertile, nature, like some lovely woman, trying to frown and smiling in her own despite. To the left is the Solent, the broad channel that divides the island from the opposite coast of Hampshire; even in calm weather the pent-up waters are generally to be seen heaving with a tremendous swell, but, when the wind is at all high, the rising tide comes in six foot abreast and breaks upon the rocks with the noise of thunder, the whole being one mass of white foam, as if it were some devil's caldron. On the right shines the moon,—for it should be seen by moonlight,—upon broad downs that are covered with a short sweet grass, but so steep that they can hardly be ascended by any thing except the goat. Farther on, the hills are not less lofty but more easy of access, and dotted over with sheep, whose diminished forms show the height at which they are feeding. Yet farther, the scene again changes, and more decidedly; from the margin of the sea upwards rises a triple line of cliffs, one piled as it were upon the other, with a narrow platform between each, rendered still more wild and romantic by the detached fragments of rock that are profusely scattered around, of all forms, and some of extraordinary dimensions. Many of these have been covered by time with a variety of shrubs and moss, and thus bear witness to the remote date of the convulsion, which has hurled them from their bases; others again remain rough and naked, and mock the eye with all manner of fantastic shapes, as they lie in the broad moonlight, or sleep, partially hidden, in the shadow of the hills. Thus wavering between light and darkness, it requires no

very great stretch of the imagination to convert them into the ruins of some mighty city, or, as the night deepens, the fancy, yet more excited, may see in their indistinct masses the monuments of some primeval race, whose very existence is forgotten.

Next comes—and it is a fit climax to this extraordinary scene—Black-Gang Chine, a tremendous fissure opening out upon the sea ; the power, which has thus cleaved the solid earth, seems to have left a curse behind it, for not a blade of grass appears on the sides of the precipice. Through this chasm runs, or rather creeps, amid mire and weeds, a thin stream of water till it comes to the brow of a second cliff, over which it splashes, discolouring the loam by the iron it carries with it.

It was in this wild spot, but in the part of it lying nearest to Sandrock, that two young officers were lounging along, one of them under the character of a *felicity-hunter*, such being the term applied by the islanders to those who visit their little paradise. They were cousins, and the elder, who, if not exactly a native of Vectis, had yet from long residence in it become acquainted with its localities, was playing the part of cicerone to his less informed companion.

“Yonder,” he said, “is Bonchurch, the first place in the island that received the light of Christianity. That building on the tremendous free-stone cliff, full seven hundred and fifty feet above high water-mark, is Saint Catherine’s Tower.”

“Tower do you call it!” said Albert ; “to my mind it looks more like a light-house.”

“It was originally a Christian Pharos,” replied Edgar, “and served the double purpose of a light-house and a chapel dedicated to Saint Catherine. Walter, lord of the manor of Godyton, was the founder in the year 1323, and his piety or his folly,

call it which you will, robbed his own kin of certain lands that he might establish a foundation for a priest to sing mass there."

"For which excellent deed may heaven confound him, now and for ever," said Albert.

"I should cry amen to that prayer, had he not also provided funds at the same time for the maintenance of a beacon in the tower. But his good and his evil have both passed away; at the dissolution our English Blue-Beard seized on the funds, and thus silenced the priest while he extinguished the beacon. Still you see the tower stands a guide for mariners in the day-time."

"And that little creek?" asked Albert, pointing below.

"That," said Edgar, "is Puckaster Cove."

"Puck again!" exclaimed Albert; "why the merry elf seems to be an extensive landholder in this same island of yours; Puck Fields, Puck-a-star Cove—for that, I suppose, is the real meaning of your Puckaster—and heaven knows how many Pucks besides. I wish he would make over some of his property to me."

"You believe then that he is only a creation of the poet's fancy?" said Edgar.

"Say of the people's fancy," replied Albert, "and you will have hit the white; *that* is believing as much as any man in his senses would wish to do."

"Quite wrong," exclaimed a voice of unusual force, yet sweet at the same time as the sweetest music.

"Some prying knave has overheard us," cried Albert.

"Quite wrong!" repeated the same melodious voice.

"Do you hear?" said Albert, whose conceit was not a little tickled by this odd salute; "do you hear

him, her, or it, for the gender's not so certain. The old proverb, I find, spoke truth when it said 'there are no downs without eyes, nor hedges without ears.' "

"Quite right," responded the voice, and suddenly up started in their path a mannikin, who might well be called the Gray Man, for he was gray all over,—gray boots, gray pantaloons, gray jerkin, gray mantle, and even his beard was gray, not as in old age with a silver tint, but approaching the colour of ashes. Albert laughed outright at this odd figure; the more prudent Edgar nudged his arm to be silent, and would fain have passed on had his companion been so inclined; when, however, he found that Albert would not move, he could do no other, as a friend and a soldier, than stay beside him and share his peril whatever it might be; and in truth, though the Gray Mantle had a strange leer with his eyes, he was yet to all outward seeming much more comical than dangerous. To Albert's inquiries of who he was, he replied very cavalierly, "I am he you wot of, a certain frolicsome sprite; though I don't much like to hear my name mentioned till the moon is higher."

His reply was received with a fresh burst of laughter from the incredulous Albert, who shouted till the downs rang again with his merriment. The Gray Man was evidently waxing fast into wrath; once,—twice,—thrice, he struck the ground with his elfin staff, and at the third blow a small silvery fountain leaped from the ground and shot up into the air in a thin spiral that glittered with all the colours of the rainbow, and, falling to earth again, formed for itself a basin. The soldiers were both astonished, Albert even more so than his cousin, for his reason was at variance with the testimony of his senses. Puck eyed them maliciously, and asked

with a sarcastic sneer if they were yet satisfied, or whether they wanted any farther proof of his identity. At this question Edgar repeated his nudgings and winkings more earnestly than ever, but the stout Albert, whose curiosity was now thoroughly awakened, determined to know a little more of the goblin ere they parted. Without paying the slightest attention to his cousin's hint, he boldly addressed the Gray Mantle:—

“ Certes, my little man, you are queer-looking enough to be Robin Goodfellow, or any one of his merry companions ; but if you really are *he*, give us a taste of your fairy qualities,—something of a higher cast than this business of the water ; it's small credit to Master Puck to turn well-digger.”

“ Did I not warn you not to mention that name ?” said the spirit, with a glimmer of his fierce little eyes that showed he was again relapsing into choler.

“ Scowl not so ferociously,” replied Albert, laughing ; “ there's sixpence for good luck, and now tell me where I was last night.”

The Gray Mantle's brow grew dark as a Culbone evening, where for the three winter months the sun is never seen. He tossed the silver from him with an indignant air, and stretched out his elfin rod towards the water, saying in a low thrilling voice,

“ Spirit of Time, a moment stay ;  
A moment fold thy restless wings ;  
And turn the page of yesterday,  
That mortal eye may read the things  
Which *were*, and which thy pen of brass  
Hath graven there no more to pass.”

At the sound of his voice the waters began to hiss, and boil, and tumble like a yesty sea, and continued thus fretting till the little pool was one entire sheet of the whitest snow. Then again the foam rolled off, as if it had been a curtain from before a

mirror, and the pure element lay there more bright and tranquil than ever. And now a heap of broken shapes and colours rose confusedly on the surface, but these in a few minutes blended themselves, and presented a bedroom, in which sat a lady at her toilette arranging her dark locks before a glass, while close beside her lay her night-gear. Edgar felt his eyes riveted to the watery mirror in spite of his misgivings, for in the lady he recognised his mistress, and a feeling of jealous wrath began to arise in his bosom at the idea of his cousin seeing even her shadow thus imperfectly attired. Something of the same kind evidently passed through the brain of Albert, by his sly laugh and his jogging his companion's elbow. But even then the scene was beginning to assume a more serious aspect. A figure, closely wrapt up, entered at the window, and was welcomed by the lady as an expected visitant.

"Gad-a-mercy, fair frailty!" exclaimed Albert; "you have no mind, I see, to lead apes in hell."

Edgar's right hand convulsively grasped his sword, while his whole frame trembled, and his brow grew black with the sudden tide of passion.

"Would you see more?" asked the malicious elf.

Edgar essayed to speak, and the motion of his quivering lips replied in the affirmative, though no sound came from them. Again the spirit held forth his staff, when the mantle dropt from the shadow and discovered the perfect resemblance of Albert, as if his image had been reflected on the water. Edgar groaned aloud. In an instant the gray man with all his fantastic illusions had vanished, and the two cousins stood alone in the growing moonlight. There was a few minutes' pause, while the one remained silent from the violence of the passion that

was tearing at his very heart, and the other was mute from wonder.

"Draw, villain!" exclaimed Edgar at length, his features black and swollen with the inward tumult.

"Are you mad, Edgar?" replied his cousin; "do you really put any faith in these phantoms, which whether they were mere jugglery, or an illusion of the fiend, I know not?"

"Draw, villain!" reiterated the incensed Edgar.

"Not now, cousin; if we must fight on this subject, for which I see no occasion—but if we must, let it be on the morrow, when you will probably be a little cooler and know better what you are about than you seem to do now."

Blinded by his rage, Edgar struck his cousin, and Albert, reeling from the violence of the blow, was in his turn too much exasperated to listen to reason any longer. He too drew his sword, and flinging away the sheath in token that it was a combat for life or death, commenced a furious attack, which was returned with no less vigour, and in less than five minutes he was stretched bleeding upon the turf. This catastrophe brought both the friends to their senses.

"This is a bad business," said Albert; "I am dying—a plague on the knavish goblin!—but it's all my own fault; had I listened to your advice, my sage Edgar, this had not happened."

Edgar gazed upon his bleeding friend without the power of utterance. A thousand images of the past and present were crowding on his brain, all sharpened into painful distinctness by the intense feelings of the moment. The thought of his bride, of the mother of him he had mortally wounded, of his own possible fate as a murderer, with the contingent circumstances belonging to each of these imaginations,—all, opposite as they were, lay before his



fancy in broad sunshine. It is wonderful how acute the perception becomes under the pressure of any imminent danger. The light crackling of a rotten branch, as it was snapped off by the night wind, sounded to his ear with the report of a pistol.

During this, Albert grew paler and paler, the blueness of death was on his lips, and cold drops stood visibly upon his forehead. He lay in a pool of his own blood, and murmured something so faintly however that Edgar bent over him to catch the feeble tones.

"Fly !" muttered the dying man ; " fly, before any one discovers you."

But Edgar was stupified, and, ere he could recover himself, a party of friends came up, who were returning home from a dinner at Newport. As it chanced to turn out, this was the best thing that could have happened, for the declaration of his dying cousin acquitted him of the crime of murder, which else had been inevitably fixed upon him from the total absence of witnesses to the transaction. But, although he was thus cleared to the world, his intended bride could never be brought to look upon him in any other light than that of an assassin. She refused all further communication with a man whose hands were stained with the blood of his own cousin, and in despair, Edgar quitted his country for a foreign service, to die—not on the field of honour, as he had fondly anticipated, but on the bed of a camp hospital.

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"A right merry tragedy, and most doleful comedy is this of yours," said Alfred, when his companion left off had speaking ; "foregad a Canterbury tale smells not half so sweet. But toss off your glass, it

will, maybe, wash away the cobwebs such a story must have left behind it."

"A man might have worse counsel given him than that," replied David; "so here it goes, upseys,—to the health of the good people."

"With all my heart; to the health of the good people; though, by-the-by, if they are not better, ay, and a great deal better, than the good people of the upper earth, I would not give sixpence for the whole mob of them; I'd have my change out of my money—fivepence three farthings at the least, and even then I should hold myself a loser by the bargain."

David set down his glass with a deep sigh; "What a pity it is we can't make wine for ourselves without going to your Frenchman or Spaniard for it."

"And so we might," replied Alf, "an we had the wit of our forefathers. They made their own wine from their own grapes, and I suppose the sun shines with us much as it did in those days. Have you ever heard of old Stowe?"

"Not I; is he a vintner?"

"*Is! was*, you mean; and he *was* a tailor."

"Oh, then I suppose this tailor made his own wine, the jolly dog!"

"If he did it's more than I ever heard of. But he tells us that 'in Richard the Second's time, wine was made from the grapes in Windsore Park, whereof some part was spent in the king's house and some part sold to his profit, and the tithes whereof were paid to the Abbot of Waltham, then parson both of Old and New Windsore.'"

"By the Lord Harry, I wish we had the trick of it now-a-days; however, it won't do for me to stand listening to your yarns any longer, for we expect the Nancy to-night from Granville, and if all sorts

smoothly, you will find a keg of the right stuff in your garden by the morning."

Left to his own reflections, and those unaided by the bottle, Alf was in no very comfortable mood. He wished for all manner of things, high and low, possible and impossible—for fortune—for an estate—for a cup that by some fairy sleight would constantly replenish itself when empty, so that he might have no stint in his potations. But a man soon grows tired of empty wishes. As a last hope of solace he had recourse to his beloved fiddle, and for once found this potent charm unable to secure his attention; he played, it is true, but the action was mechanical, and it was soon evident that his thoughts went not with the music; his eyes were fixed on the fire, and, as is usually the case with people who indulge in that agreeable amusement, his fancy shaped the glowing embers into a variety of illusive appearances; there were capes and castles, drakes and dromedaries, bears with two heads, and elephants with none, and the more he watched, the more vivid grew the resemblances. At length the fire, becoming hollow, fell together and thrust forward a single red-hot ember, in which two bright eyes seemed to be twinkling. The illusion was wonderful. Alf incontinently stinted in his play, though he did not the more let go either bow or fiddle, and stared at this strange appearance with might and main.

Still the eyes twinkled,—twinkled,—twinkled,—when presently two large black ears protruded from either side. Alf quickly drew back his chair, muttering half aloud and half to himself, "he needs a long spoon who sups with the devil."

Still the eyes twinkled,—twinkled,—twinkled,—and now a nose and mouth made their appearance; then a pair of portentously long arms; then a misshapen trunk; then a pair of wiry legs; till a com-

plete little black figure peered at him from out the embers, with a grotesque yet malicious leer, that made him start up and hastily place the chair between himself and the fireplace. Leaning over the back of the seat, he fixed his gaze intently on the apparition.

Still the eyes twinkled,—twinkled,—twinkled,—and the black colour of the goblin brightened into a vivid orange, then into a crimson; and then again it successively faded into green, into purple, into blue, and finally sobered down into gray.

“By G—d!” exclaimed Alfred, “it’s the little gray man that David talked of; Puck himself!”

At the mention of his name, Gray Mantle bounced from the fire, overturning poker, tongs, and shovel in his flight, and perched himself upon the back of the chair from which Alf had retreated in a prodigious hurry. There the little fellow sat, puffing and blowing, much like the frog in the fable, but with infinitely better success, for he did contrive to swell himself into the size of a moderately grown baboon, without any apparent damage to his skin from the process of inflation.

The astonishment of the reveller increased with every moment. Unconsciously he drew his bow across the fiddle, when up jumped the strange visitor, and put himself into the attitude of an opera dancer preparing for a pas seul after his first bound upon the scene. There he stood in position, as if waiting for the first note of the music. The thing was irresistible. Alf gave a preluding flourish, upon which one gray leg was gracefully elevated till it came on a level with the horizon, and then off they both set, the musician fiddling as if for dear life, and the dancer springing about furiously to the right and left, cutting capers and turning pirouettes in the true spirit of a modern artist.

The longer the sport continued, the wilder it grew, and, as far as the sprite was concerned, the dance seemed to be interminable; nothing could exhaust the agility of the gray legs. But it was not quite the same with his musician; though highly tickled with the conceit of the thing, yet, in the absence of his usual potations, Alf's energy soon began to flag, and his time had gradually declined from prestissimo to presto, from that to allegro, and was now jogging along in a lazy allegretto, to the sore discomfiture of the elf, who cried out, "faster! faster!" Thus urged, the reveller quickened his movements till the perspiration stood upon his forehead. Still the spirit's cry was "faster! faster!" and, determined not to be outdone if he could help it, Alf played at the utmost speed of his arm and fingers. This, however, by no means altered the relative positions of himself and the energetic pirouetter, for the more rapidly he played the more furiously the other danced, and though it might be fairly expected that by this time the goblin would be out of breath, this was so far from being the case that he continued his old cry of "faster! faster!"

Mortal flesh and blood could endure it no longer. Alf suddenly laid down his fiddle, exclaiming, "If you are not tired, my friend, I can tell you who is, and that's myself; so sit down with you and take breath for a little."

The elf grinned from ear to ear, and jumped into a chair, wherein he sat much as a monkey might do, to which in truth he bore no slight resemblance. Alf, who did not lack hospitality, cast a piteous glance at the empty flagon.

"I am sorry I have nothing better to offer you than the pure element, and that, I fear, will sit but coldly on your stomach after all your capering."

Without making any reply, Puck drew a silver chalice from under his gray cloak ; and, lifting up the lid, a perfume came from it that filled the room. From his Oxford experience Alf well knew it was the odour of the richest wine that was ever pressed from the grapes of Burgundy. He smacked his lips with anticipating relish, and claimed his share as between guest and host, observing at the same time that the cup was unluckily of the smallest. To this remark the goblin replied only by pouring out the contents of the chalice on the floor, a proceeding at which Alf lustily shouted out, "Sacrilege !" but before he could interfere to prevent it he saw that the vessel had refilled itself to the very brim with wine of the same flavour.

"Passion o' my heart !" he exclaimed, in ecstasy, "what an admirable invention ! will you sell it, my little friend ?"

"How much will you give for it ?" replied Puck, with a knavish grin, that betrayed his intimate acquaintance with the depths and shallows of the propounder's purse.

Alf hastily put his hand into his pocket, but as hastily withdrew it again, his face being considerably elongated by the result of this very useless experiment. The spirit, however, who seemed to be in one of his most whimsical moods, proposed to let him have the cup in exchange for a game at leap-frog with him and his companions. A game at leap-frog with Puck, and Mustard-seed, and Cobweb, and Peas-blossom, and the body-guard of Oberon and Queen Titania ! Heavens ! to the ears of Alfred, always ready for a joke,—and the wilder the merrier—such a proposal sounded as a trumpet would to a war-horse. Few words were needed to seal the bargain, and forth they sallied to the greensward, upon which the moon was now shi-

ning brightly from a full circle. Immediately Puck began to summon his companions in tones of inexpressible sweetness:—

“Elves that in the blue-bell sleep,  
On whose lids the night-dews weep ;  
Sprites, that skim the azure sea  
To the spheres’ far melody ;  
Fays that in the moonlight love,  
While the stars smile from above ;—  
Come hither ! oh come hither !  
We’ve a prank to play together—  
A prank that must be played  
Ere the evening star shall fade.  
Come hither ! oh come hither !”

At this invitation, the downs instantly swarmed with tiny sprites of all sorts, sizes, and complexions, and the trampling of their myriad feet sounded like the galloping of an army of mice. Alf, as he looked round and saw himself environed by this multitude, could not help thinking of a village steeple overtopping a crowd of tributary tombstones.

The sport began, at first soberly enough, each sprite leaping in order over the back of Alf, with a whoop and a snap of his fingers, as if he were performing a feat of no small magnitude. At last it came to Puck’s turn, when the malicious rogue, instead of springing over the reveller, struck smartly with a battledore on the seat of honour and sent him flying into the air,—to the moon, as Alf at one time began to think, where he expected to hang upon her horns till, growing full and round again, she naturally pushed him off from want of room to hold him. Soon, however, he found himself falling in short gyrations, even more rapidly than he had ascended, but before he could touch the earth, he was received by a thousand ready battledores, and away he went again. Peas-blossom, for as delicate as she seemed, met him bat in hand with a whack

that sounded like a pistol-shot, and sent him spinning through the air, to fall upon the uplifted racket of Cavaliero Cobweb; he, in turn, forwarded him by a dexterous blow into the hands of Mustard-seed, a sharp-faced little elf, covered over with tiny bristles, like the down upon a nettle, and stinging no less sharply. Then, too, there was such a whooping, and laughing, and jostling, and struggling among the elfin crew for a fair slap at the mark as it descended; their innumerable voices joining in a merry chorus, to which they kept time with admirable precision, for their blows came in regularly with the leading note of every bar—

“ Oh, we frolic by night,  
In the merry moonlight,  
With the stars burning bright.  
On the breeze and on the billow,  
In the cowslip, on the willow  
Rocking, mocking is our pillow,  
Oh, we frolic by night!  
Oh, we frolic by night!”

To these proceedings, it may be supposed, the living shuttlecock did not fail to make energetic protests, as he skimmed along from battledore to battledore; but he would better have spared the little breath that remained to him for the benefit of his aërial excursion; the more he scolded or implored, the louder grew the mirth of his tormentors, every oh! and ah! being answered by a corresponding whack—whack—from one or other of the numerous rackets that glittered to and fro in the merry moonlight. In the midst of all this din the cock crew. At the sound the whole host twinkled away like the going out of the sparks from a sheet of burnt paper; and Alf, no longer held up by the impulse from the rackets, plumped down to earth with



a shock that endamaged his sitting part for a month afterward.

Sorely bruised, and vowing a dire revenge against his tormentors, the unlucky aeronaut crawled, as well as he could, towards his cottage. Here he met with a sight the best calculated to allay his resentment, being neither more nor less than the silver goblet, full, as before, of the richest Burgundy. At first, indeed, he was too sulky on the score of his late aerial excursion and the awkward tingling it had left behind,—behind in the twofold sense of the word,—to touch the cup at all, but this mood was not of long continuance; he sniffed at the rich wine, and the odour had a marvellous effect in qualifying any acrimony of the bile. He must take a few sips—there was no harm in a few sips,—and their dulcifying tendency acted upon him like oil on troubled water. A longer draught completed the conquest, and while he smacked his lips with ineffable relish, he was only fearful lest the cup, to which he thought himself fairly entitled, should have lost its original property of filling itself again when exhausted. Earnestly did he watch the decrease of the precious liquid each time he took the chalice from his lips, and it was with a deep sigh that he set it down after his concluding draught, and found the bottom of the cup remained visible in spite of all his coaxing. In the true spirit of a reveller he turned out the last drop upon his thumb-nail,—supernaculum, the toppers of that age termed it,—and again placed the empty vessel on the table. But how great and how agreeable was his surprise, when he actually saw the wine begin to bubble up, as if from a secret spring, and go on flowing till the liquor was level with the brim. In some doubt of the sprite's honesty after his late scurvy tricks, he ventured to taste—it was the same Burgundy as before!

"Puck for ever!" he cried: "I forgive him all his tricks—confound the chair, it grows harder I think as it grows older—but I forgive Puck all his tricks in consideration of this blessed cup, which is more worth than the silver goblet that Saint Just stole from his friend Saint Kevyn, and got his head broken for his pains."

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## CHAPTER II.

I shall be well helped up with such a squire.

ADVENTURES OF FIVE HOURS.

It will easily be supposed that the chalice did not remain an idle gift in the hands of so professed an admirer of good wine as Alfred Somerton. Every day he got most regularly drunk, a species of regularity so little to the taste of Marian, the doctor's daughter already mentioned, that she made up her mind, if her words might be believed, to renounce him altogether. In truth she was a lovely, noble-hearted girl, and deserved a better partner in the dance of life than she was likely to find in an habitual drunkard. After many ineffectual warnings, the angry fair one closed the door in his face, and for several days—it was almost a week—refused to see him, in defiance of love's proverbial frailty of resolution. Highly indignant with the goblet for having brought upon him this apparently irretrievable disgrace, he flung it into a fathomless chasm, that had lately opened in the ground, about two or three hundred yards from the edge of the cliff. But this deed of virtue was far from carrying with it its own recompense, as virtue is usually said to do. No sooner

was the cup gone beyond all possibility of reclaiming, than he mourned for it as tenderly as ever did David for his son Absalom; nor was it till after the lapse of many days that he began to console himself by reflecting, that if he drank nothing but water there was no great chance of his getting drunk; a merit which might go far to appease the wrath of Marian.

"I think," said he, as he sat one night gazing out on the starry heavens, by way of abstracting his thoughts as much as possible from the lost wine-cup—"I think Marian must forgive me now, that I have tasted nothing but water for a whole fortnight—to be sure I hardly know where I could have got any thing better; but then there's no occasion for letting her into that secret; so she must forgive me, the rather—" and this was uttered one part in jest and three in earnest—"the rather as the moon, I see, is in conjunction with Venus; and what say the astrologers? When the moon is in conjunction with Venus, it is good to seek the love of women, for now they be tractable; and on the sextile to take a wife, for then women be fond."

But notwithstanding the assurances of astrology and his confidence in his own merits, the matter was far from being so easily carried as he had expected. There was an evil planet in the house of Venus, appearing under the guise of old Alice. This ancient dame had nursed Marian when an infant, and was now retained in her old age, partly from habit, partly from kind recollections, and, not least, from that benevolent species of vanity, which compels us in some measure to regard those who are sincerely attached to us, whatever else may be their failings. This cross-grained crone hated, from the pure acidity of her nature, all that walked on two legs, saving and excepting her young mistress;

but her especial antipathy was reserved for those who chanced to be the favourites of her favourite. Such a temper would have been too magnificently lodged had it been placed in a form of the usual proportions, and accordingly Dame Nature had, with very laudable thrift, made her outside of the roughest materials. She was a short, gaunt, bony woman, not very unlike a mummy, supposing always the mummy to be animated. She might have been a hundred years old, from the colour and wrinkles of her shrivelled skin ; though, to judge from the steadiness of her walk and the brightness of her little mouse-like eyes, she was not much beyond the prime of life. The nose and chin nearly met, and composed the greater part of her face, which seemed to be without cheek-bones ; and her forehead, except that it bulged out in a most extraordinary way at the brows, bore a striking resemblance to the head of a vulture. It is probable that, since the world was a world, a more decided piece of witch-like ugliness had never scared child or crooned tale over the winter's hearth ; her dress too was admirably calculated to set off this unusual deformity, belonging as it did, neither entirely to the period, nor altogether to her own invention, but being a heterogeneous compound of the two. Long-pointed shoes, with immense brass buckles, a red overlay that was neither gown nor tunic, belted round the waist with a broad band of leather, and reaching half way down the legs, a pair of stockings of the same colour and material, and a tall conical hat or cap of black velvet, covering a shock of hair that was dark as the wing of a raven—these, with an ivory-headed cane, certainly not carried for use, completed the outward appearance of Dame Alice.

From what has been said, it will be easily comprehended that the old woman entertained a pecu-

liar animosity against Alfred, who had not only presumed to win the heart of Marian, but had farther aggravated his offence by showing himself to be totally unworthy of her affection. It was, therefore, with infinite delight that she employed her time in collecting his various misdeeds, old and recent, and conveying them, in any thing but a diluted form, to the unwilling ear of Marian. On the present occasion chance made him a hearer of the old woman's testimony to his many virtues, both public and domestic, without her being aware of his lying so near in ambush.

He had reached the garden that completely surrounded the house with its tall hedge of holly, when his attention was caught by the sound of voices, the tones of which were far from being amicable. Upon peeping through the bushes he saw the young lady and her nurse, who were holding, in the language of the Ashantees, a solemn palaver, of which his merits formed the subject. Alice who, it seemed, had been on the watch as usual, had witnessed, or at least heard of, his late festival exceedings, and was repeating them to Marian with some slight seasoning from her own caustic and inventive fancy. It did not, however, appear that the listener took much pleasure in these details; on the contrary, her replies were sharp, her tones peevish, and in answer to some remark, that by its superior keenness had reached a vulnerable part, she burst out with, "I can bear this no longer, Alice; your tongue trots the horse's gallop, and every inch of your road is paved with slander."

"Slander!" retorted the indignant crone; "marry come up! every word's as true as a printed book."

"True or false, I'll hear no more of it. Speak little, speak well, and well will be spoken again."

"What, we can cap proverbs, can we?" cried

the bitter-tongued beldame : " Gads, my precious ! I should not wonder ! But take your own counsel ; marry your good-for-nothing, rake-helly drunkard, and look what will come of it ; I shall see you with half a dozen ragged urchins, knocking at the little wicket of the poor-house, while your sweet husband stands in the highway with half a hat, a doublet with three buttons, and a great cudgel under his arm, begging for twopence."

Alfred's ears tingled at this diatribe, and the parting look of Alice, as she hobbled off without tarrying for a reply, was to the full as bitter as her words. With a feeling something akin to fear, or at least to shame, he waited till the sybil was hidden from view by a sudden turn in the path, and the next instant he was at the feet of his mistress ; she burst into a flood of tears. Alfred was no less shocked than surprised at the violence of her emotions, and, for the moment, all his better feelings awoke within him, and he stood before her, self-reproved indeed, but with the look and sentiment of other days, ere misery had driven him to folly.

" Marian !" he said, taking her hand affectionately, and in those winning tones which are music to the heart,— " Marian, can you forgive me ?"

" Can you forgive yourself ?" retorted Marian.

" No, by Heavens ! I am a brute ! a beast ! a swine ; worse than any that drank out of the fabled cup of Circe ; a syren tempted them to evil, but an angel would win me into the right path, were I not slaved by this accursed and accursing passion. But it shall be so no longer ; I will tear it from my heart, or rend the heart itself from this vile body."

Marian smiled sadly ; " You mean all this now, I doubt it not, but your resolution will fail you almost before my tears have dried."

" Not so, Marian ; not so, my beloved ; I swear."

"Make no rash vows," interrupted Marian; "I know you better than you know yourself; the wind itself is not more changeable. In one hour you will veer through every point, north and south, east and west, in the compass of the human passions."

"Come, I am glad to hear that, however," exclaimed Alfred; "there is some hope then that I may fling off my bibulous propensities."

"There it is now," said Marian, sighing; "a minute, nay, a moment since, and you were all penitence and passion; now the mood has passed with the hurry of the squall, rolling across the quiet sea, and your tone is changed to levity and laughter."

"Tut, tut, Marian; you weigh these matters too nicely; a man may pass from a sad face to a merry one, and yet maintain his constancy unaltered."

"Heaven grant it prove so! if my prayers, if my tears can avail you, they shall not be wanting. And remember, this is your last trial."

There was a short pause, in which the feelings of both parties were excited to the utmost. Marian again wept aloud on the shoulder of Alfred, who at length, by the energy of his protests, succeeded in convincing her against her better judgment, and the reconciled lovers sat together as they had been wont in their happiest hours. A smile returned to the rosy mouth of Marian, languid at first, but by degrees warm with love and tenderness, and her eyes sparkled as she said, "I am a fond, silly girl for giving way thus, and have the less right to reprove your weakness, since I show the same infirmity of purpose."

"No more of that an you love me," said Alfred; "you have turned over a new leaf in my volume, and it would be a pity to blot it with a single tear. A month will soon pass, and then we shall be happy—"

"Or perhaps miserable—a second Baldwyn chronicle."

"Who the deuse was he? I wot not of the gentleman," said Alfred, glad to catch at any thing that might turn the conversation.

"It was both lady and gentleman," replied Marian.

"Who were they, then? some Hampshire Pyramus and Thisbe, I hope."

"Not exactly, for it appears by the book that Thisbe killed herself for the loss of Pyramus—you smile, so I suppose I quote the story wrong, and it was Pyramus who killed himself for the loss of Thisbe."

"Right both ways, my dear Marian."

"Well, be that as it may; our Thisbe quarrelled with poor Pyramus from morning till night, and one day, when their feuds ran higher than usual, the lady vowed, if she had the good luck to survive her husband, she would most certainly dance over his grave, whether it was covered with turf or marble. This nettled Pyramus exceedingly, and, to defraud his loving spouse of her expected amusement, he enjoined his heir to throw his body without ceremony into the Solent. In the church register of Lymington, the event is thus pithily recorded; 'Samuel Baldwyn, Esqr. sojourner of this parish, was immersed, without the Needles, in Scratcher's Bay, sans ceremonie, May 20th.'

"A pretty tale, and told as prettily."

"That of course, when a lady tells and a lover listens," said Marian, laughing; "but, if you really are enamoured of these follies, when the time serves I will supply you with enough useless lore to set up a dozen romancers."

"Voto de Dios!" exclaimed Alfred, in the same



tone of banter ; " I knew not you possessed so rare a quality."

" Oh, I am deep read in all such mysteries, from the Cornish giant Tregagle down to the minimum of fairies. I can tell you how the Manksmen went to place a tub for the good people to bathe in ; how physicians of old were not allowed to marry, because our dear simple starched grandpapas thought none but a bachelor could set a limb or write a recipe ; how, when folks lay in a trance, it was supposed they were receiving some supernatural communication from heaven, or the place you wot of ; how, ' as Theodoricus sat at his meat, after he had put to death Boethius and Symmachus, his son-in-law, a fish's head being brought before him, he saw in it the countenance of Symmachus, looking horribly, which, biting the nether lip, with lowering eyes, seemed to threaten him ; wherewith the king, being sore abashed, fell into a grievous sickness, whereof he afterward died ;' for all which wonderful and veracious details see ' Lewes Laveterus, Or GHOSTS, translated into English by R. H.' There's chapter and verse for you, and I heartily wish every romancer could quote as good evidence for his stories."

" Go on, go on," said Alfred, to whose ears every word was music.

" What ! not tired yet ? then I must tell you how the merry sprite, Robin Good-fellow, whom some rather call Friar Rush, and others Puck—"

" Puck !" interrupted Alfred, hastily ; " do you know any thing of that mischievous little villain ?"

" Give him no ugly names, I beseech you, for he is an old friend and favourite of mine. Well thought of ; that reminds me I have a present for you, a small silver goblet, which was once the elf's, and shall

be yours—on condition, you drink nothing out of it but water for the next twelvemonth.”

“A present from your hands !” exclaimed the delighted lover ; “that will indeed be a treasure.”

“You will say so when you have heard the tale belonging to it. This cup is called *The Luck of Eden Hall*,—Eden Hall in Cumberland—and was given to me by my godmother. The story runs, that the butler, going one day to draw water from St. Cuthbert’s Well, surprised a party of fairies, who were feasting on the green beside it. He stole near enough, without being noticed, to catch up a goblet that lay by the brink of the well ; but no sooner did he attempt to make off with his prize, than they one and all started in pursuit of him. It was now, according to the old adage,—the devil take the hindmost. The fairies were the swiftest, but not the stoutest, and being defeated in the scuffle that ensued, they flew off, exclaiming in prophetic chorus.

‘ If that cup break or fall  
Farewell the luck of Eden Hall.’

But I will go and fetch the cup, which, by-the-by, some incredulous folks have the assurance to say is neither more nor less than the sacred chalice, belonging to Saint Cuthbert’s chapel. As that, however, would spoil my story, I insist upon you believing as I have told you.”

Off tripped Marian on a light foot that even the fairies might have envied, and in a few minutes returned with the goblet. Alfred started back in wonder from the proffered gift—it was either the very same cup that he had flung into the chasm not an hour before, or else it was so close a facsimile that eye could make no distinction between them. Marian, who attributed his surprise to some superstitious feelings arising out of the legend, en-

joyed the jest beyond measure, as he took the cup with comical reluctance, and repeatedly turned it over to be quite certain that it did not possess within itself the magic fountain.

"Surely," she said, "you do not expect to coax any wine out of an empty goblet, by turning it upside down so frequently and draining it upon your thumb-nail?"

"I don't exactly know," replied Alfred; "it is marvellously like a certain acquaintance of mine"—again he reversed the cup—"there's not a drop of wine in it, so it can't be the same, after all—huzza! the enemy has fled—Richard's himself again!"

It was Marian's turn to look surprised—"What's the matter now?"

"Nothing, nothing, dear Marian. I accept your gift as a sign of grace—as a pardon of the past, and a token of the future; and I will drink your health from it in the first pure stream I meet with."

Many a good-humoured jest and soft reproach grew out of this, and when the lovers parted, it might be said they had taken a new lease of their affection, so perfect was their harmony. Away trudged Alfred with his prize, in the best of all possible tempers with himself and all the world, having upon him that joyous glow, which good intents ever impart in anticipation. At the first clear spring he stopped to perform his vow, but,—oh, that unhappy malefactor, *but!*—the wine began to bubble up in the chalice as from a fountain. Was Alfred pleased or vexed at this surreptitious return of his enemy? he did not know himself.

"I thought how it would be," he cried; "I thought it was the same delightful, damnable, smiling, treacherous piece of silver! what shall I do?—fling it away again? that would be a pity, seeing that it has thrown itself upon my hospitality a second time,

after having been kicked out of doors so unceremoniously. If I could only trust to my resolution not to empty the cup above twice—or it might be thrice—or even four times in the four-and-twenty hours—confound it, no ; that will never do ; I shall never be able to refrain when my lips have once touched the wine-pot ; I could sip up the Severn and swallow Malvern as soon—It must go,” he added, in a doleful tone, after a few minutes of doubt and hesitation ; “ by the pippin that tempted grandmamma Eve, it must go.”

If it gave him some difficulty to adopt this resolve, it cost him still more to carry it into effect. In the words of the poet it was “ multa gemens,” with many a groan, that he took his way to Luccombe Chine, where in the near vale lay a neglected well, the depth of which, like the Gulley in Chertsy Meads, was said to be unfathomable. This was a bad choice, if all was true that was spoken, for according to the popular faith wells are the common haunt of fairies—unless, indeed, he was influenced by an excess of honesty, and wished to return the good people their borrowed treasure.

From his manner any one would have imagined he carried some living animal under his cloak, so extremely affectionate was he in his caresses of the hidden goblet, hugging it to his bosom and apostrophizing it from time to time with the most passionate devotion. Matters were still worse when he actually stood on the brink of the well with the doomed vessel in his hand. Now, for the first time, he observed the figure of a beautiful female in high relief upon the lid, of a workmanship so exquisite as for a moment to withdraw his attention from thoughts of more serious import. Strange to say, the image seemed to return him gaze for gaze, and to look at him most beseechingly, as if imploring him

not to throw her into the water, a fate which, setting aside the indignity of being drowned like some supernumerary blind kitten, might in reason be supposed peculiarly disagreeable to one who was the presiding genius of a wine-cup. This, however, only rendered him more desperate, and wisely thinking that if the devil of beauty joined the devil of wine in his temptations, a poor sinner like himself would stand no chance, he flung the goblet from him into the well, and down it went bounding from side to side, each blow being followed by a shrill sound that might almost have passed for the cry of something human. Alf began to think that it would never reach the spring. At length, however, he heard a tremendous splash, a sure sign that the wine and water had met; but so little did the purer element relish his new acquaintance, that it immediately began to hiss and boil, and, brimming over the well, it placed Alf ankle-deep in its flood before he could recover from his amazement. The prospect of being drowned, if he remained, awoke him to the full use of his faculties, and away he scampered up the hill, followed at a furious rate by his elemental enemy. But run as he would, the water rose yet faster, and in a few seconds he found himself floundering and splashing about, while in the depths below all sorts of grotesque monsters were mocking and mowing at him. There were huge polypi with a hundred arms, all stretched towards him, and grasping as if to pull their prey down to the bottom, where the cruel shark lay in wait and gigantic crabs pointed their tremendous claws to seize and crush him. In this crisis an unlooked-for ally appeared in the shape of Gray Mantle, who, catching him by the hair, gave him a hearty ducking, and then flung him on the dry land with no more ceremony than he might have used to an old piece of sea-weed.

In an instant Alf had regained his feet, and without stopping to look over his shoulder, he fled home on wings that were plumed with terror.

Not for many months had he gone to bed so sober as he did after this adventure, and the consequence of his forced temperance was that he dreamed of nothing but pumps and pumpwater the whole night through. Bottles of wine would be set before him at an imaginary feast, but no sooner had he drawn the cork than forth spouted a jet of the detested fluid ; if he touched a bell, down tumbled the contents of a shower bath upon his head ; did he venture to take up the poker, forthwith it was transmuted into a pump handle, and, instead of stirring up the embers, he found himself raising the aqueous element at a prodigious rate and putting out the fire with it, while there he sat shivering and shaking, with raw hands and blue nose, the very genius of frost and desolation. In utter despair he began to be alarmed lest he should melt away into a fountain, like the nymph in Ovid's metamorphoses, with the farther advantage of being afterward congealed into a lump of ice. But, before this catastrophe could take place, he found himself swimming, he could not tell how or why, in the salt ocean, a change that would not have been unpleasant had it not been for a large shark that came scudding towards him with mouth like a baker's oven and teeth a good yard long, and by some inexplicable mode of perception he knew the huge fish to be the Gray Man. In the very critical moment there arose a confusion of images, a sort of pantomimic shifting of the scene, and he himself was the shark, though he still retained enough of human nature to know that the Gray Man was fishing for him from the deck of a stately vessel. He could not, however, help gorging the bait held out to him ; the hook stuck in his jaws, and he of the Gray Man-

tle was most triumphantly dragging him out of the water in spite of the cries which, though a shark, he did not fail to utter most piteously, when a tribe of fishes, large and small, came to the aid of their brother, the first seizing hold of his tail, he in turn being held by another, and so on successively through the whole row of them, after the fashion of children playing at oranges and lemons. Then there was such a splashing, and floundering and tugging, that his tail came off, and he awoke, with the sun shining full in his chamber. But what was the meaning of the light that played and sparkled upon the wall, as if reflected from some mirror? He drew aside the curtains, when lo! and behold! the first object that greeted him was the elfin vase glittering more brightly than ever as it received and gave back the morning sunbeams. Obeying the first impulse, Alf jumped out of bed and took a hearty draught of the fragrant Burgundy, the flavour of which did not fail to reconcile him to the return of the unlucky chalice, and, before he well knew what he was about, he had taken enough to make him completely forget all his sober resolutions.

His potations were disturbed by the arrival of David, with tidings that Marian and her father, Doctor Layton, were on the road, though upon what errand he, the said David, did not precisely know. Alf retained just sense enough to be well aware that he was not in a fit state to see them, a case far from being uncommon with wine-bibbers; but how was he to get out of their way, and not give as much offence by his absence as he was like to do by his presence? He turned to his boon companion, and asked, with a face of infinite pathos, "David, my dear friend David, do you think I am drunk?"

"Something very like it," replied the seaman.

"If they catch me in this pickle, she'll cut me, and Heaven knows I am cut enough already."



"Half seas over," replied the sententious David. Alf looked the very picture of helplessness, when on a sudden a bright thought appeared to strike him. His eyes lit up under the inspiration, and flashed forth like a gas-lamp at the first touch of the kindling taper.

"I have it—I have it—I am sick ; I am dying—so, fetch me my dressing-gown and my night-cap ; quick, David, quick—confound the sleeves ! there's no getting into them ; or is it your fault, you drunken brute, in not standing still ? Stand still, I say. There, that will do, if I can only reach the arm-chair ; steady, lad, steady."

"They've hauled in sight," cried David.

"Don't open the door yet, you villain. A handkerchief round my head and face ; hide the goblet in the cupboard ; and now, mind, I am ill, very ill."

"But what's the matter with you ?"

"How the devil should I know ? I am not a doctor ; but you may call it dropsy, or a fever-fit of rheumatism ; yes, it shall be rheumatism, caught by mixing too much water in my brandy."

"They'll never swallow the brandy and water," said David.

"They must."

"They won't."

"They shall : passion o' my heart ! do you think that the doctor's a Jew ? an unbelieving Thomas ? not take the word of a dying man, indeed !"

He was cut short by the entrance of his visitors, the one, as we have already seen, a lovely young girl of nineteen, fair and graceful as a lily, and the other a decided humorist, as was apparent from his dress no less than from his very peculiar features. A gold-headed cane and cocked hat were, indeed, no uncommon appendages in those days ; but his



whole attire, without being absolutely extravagant, had yet something in it that was exceedingly whimsical; his skirts were longer, his buckles larger, and his frills wider than was the fashion of his time, while his cane bore some slight resemblance, in its carved head, to a fool's bauble. His reason for carrying this odd symbol was, as he himself explained it, that the world was divided into two classes only, namely, knaves and fools; and as he was not ambitious of being thought to belong to the roguish fraternity, he had adopted the emblem of the latter.

Such were the visitors who were now received by David, open-mouthed, while Alf seconded the story of his sickness by throwing in a heavy groan at every break on the detail.

"It struck him all of a heap, as it were," said David.

"Oh!" responded the patient.

"He has been groaning all night so! by the knocking Nic'las, you would have sworn that a legion of imps had been playing at barley-break in his bones," continued the veracious seaman.

"Oh! oh!"

"Where is your pain?" asked the doctor.

"Oh! oh! oh!"

Marian knew not what to think of it. Her father eyed the patient with one of his peculiar smiles, and, having felt his pulse, declared that it was absolutely requisite to blister him without delay, the said blister to extend from the nape of the neck to the os sacrum, as he phrased it. This was doing things on a grand scale, and Alf now groaned in reality at the prospect of having his back completely scorched and scored by Spanish flies. To these lamentations the inflexible man of physic turned a deaf ear, or only noticed them as so many decided symptoms of a bad case that called for immediate remedies. Accord-

ingly he despatched Marian to his house with a written order, and in due time his apprentice appeared with a blister of formidable dimensions. Never had such a plaster been spread for mortal back since first the cantharis was introduced into European practice by the Arabian physicians. At this terrible apparition, the alarmed and refractory patient staggered up as well as he was able, and swore loudly that they should not lay a finger upon him.

"He is delirious," said the doctor.

"He is delirious!" echoed the apprentice.

"He is delirious!" shouted David, who thought it high fun to see his dear crony caught in his own trap.

Hereupon the whole party joined their forces, and fairly enveloped him in the blister, which left not an inch of his back uncovered. In vain he struggled, in vain he uttered all the curses of Ernulphus; the lord of the golden-headed cane only grew more pathetic in words and more inexorable in action.

"Poor fellow!" he exclaimed.

"Poor fellow!" sighed the apprentice.

"Poor fellow!" groaned David, his face all the time convulsed with laughter.

"Confound you, one and all, most particularly, for a set of blockheads!" roared the rebellious patient; "I am only drunk—drunk, I tell you—drunk, and be damned to you."

"He gets worse and worse," said the doctor.

"Much worse," responded the apprentice.

"Much worse," re-echoed David.

Alf looked from one to the other, and, if glances had been daggers, or otherwise endued with the property of point or edge, he had made a dire tragedy of it—

"David," he said, "you are a knave; master apprentice, you are an ass; doctor, you are both a knave

and an ass; and to the devil I pitch you all for a leash of puppies."

The doctor, affecting great alarm at the extremity of the case, proceeded, with the assistance of his myrmidons, to bind him hand and foot, and, having completed the ceremony, they left him to his meditations. Thus abandoned, the fumes of wine gradually dispelled themselves, and, the blister beginning to draw, he was soon in a state that was far from being enviable. His cries were no longer fictitious, but the result of real pain, with no slight admixture of indignation. As he writhed under the scorching influence of the flies, he vowed vengeance against the doctor and all belonging to him, his cane and trilateral hat included; he would pull his nose till it was as long as a snipe's bill—he would clip his ears as close as ever bowling-green was mowed by the gardener's scythe—he would drag him through a horse-pond, and then bake him dry-again under a southern wall when the sun was at the hottest—Heaven only knows what he would not do, time and tide serving.

In the energy of his pain he at length burst the bonds that held him. His first use of his recovered hands was to endeavour to pull off the blister; but this had gone too far, and every attempt to remove it was so much like tearing the skin from his back that he was fain to desist almost as soon as he had laid his fingers on it. This augmented his wrath, and, not being able to revenge himself upon the actual culprit, he indulged in the supreme delight of inflicting vicarious punishment on a little plaster Cupid that stood in the corner, with bow bent and arrow fixed, the blows and reproaches following much after this fashion.

"You infernal quacksalving, pill-grinding, poisoning scoundrel!"—away flew the bow and arrow,

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and half an arm with them—"I'll stick you chin-deep in a gallipot of Spanish flies"—smash went the arm sinister—"I'll pound you to death in one of your own mortars"—off whisked poor Cupid's head, beyond all hope of art to set it on again—"there!—and there!—and there!—" And with each exclamation crack went the unlucky god, till he lay in fragments on the floor, the good work not having been accomplished without some damage to the assailant, whose skin was sadly twitched by the blister each time he raised his arm, and who, groaning at every blow,

Struck and roared,  
Struck and roared,  
Struck and roared,  
And roared again.

It was some days before Alf was able to move about, by which time his choler had very considerably abated, though now and then it would slightly bubble up, as the air will rise to the top of the Champagne glass long after the first ebullition has subsided. By degrees, as his back healed, his ears opened to the whispers of prudence, who,—good time-serving lady,—suggested the propriety of his passing unnoticed this freak of the doctor's, inasmuch as Marian might be tempted to receive the affair of the blister as an atonement for his renewed inebriety. Well aware of the ticklish situation in which he stood, he sagely argued with himself thus,—  
"Woman's love is only an estate at will, and *that*, as everybody knows, is no certain inheritance; so, I'll e'en set the hare's head against the goose's giblets, and balance the doctor's knavery against Marian's forgiveness."

Even so it fell out; Marian, who considered that her father had gone full as far as he was warranted

either by the goodness of his intentions or by the usual license extended to his whimsical character, was fain to appease her lover by putting him again upon his trial.

A peace, or rather truce, being thus patched up between the high contracting powers, the subordinate party remained to be sacrificed according to the excellent custom made and provided on all such occasions. In the present affair this was the cup, and Alf set about seriously reflecting on the best means of getting rid of it, that unlucky vessel being in his mind the sole cause of his misfortunes. Drowned it would not be, as was evident from its last escape from the bottom of the well; to fling it over the cliff would in all human probability be just as little to the purpose—what if he melted it? The idea was excellent, and for the more convenient effecting of this, as well as to show his utter detestation of its enormities, he took a mallet and began to beat it together. To this process the silver cup made a determined opposition, slipping and sliding at each touch of the hammer, so as never to receive the full weight of the blow. It rolled this way—it rolled that way—it sprang up to the ceiling—and when, as a last resource, Alf fixed it to the floor, matters went still worse; the very first blow that he aimed at it glinted off, and almost smashed three of his fingers. Cursing his own awkwardness, he repeated the blow, but with the same effect, and back he jumped, shaking the damaged hand, and eyeing the goblet as if it had been a serpent. The lady on the lid, he thought, seemed to laugh at him.

“Oho!” he exclaimed; “be these your tricks? Why then I must use you as Saint Dunstan used old Beelzebub, to whom, I take it, you are not very distantly related—a first cousin at the least, if not something nearer—yes, I shall give your beautiful

nose a loving squeeze in the tongs. How will you like that, think you?"

Accordingly he took the cup in the tongs, and aimed a furious blow that jarred his arm up to the very shoulder, though without producing any thing more than a slight indent upon the stubborn metal. Astonished at the resistance, he repeated his aim, when off snapped the head of the hammer and dashed through the casement. But the most surprising part of the story was that the iron, as it whizzed along, bore a shadowy resemblance to the Gray Man, who seemed to be hurled head foremost out of the window.

"Passion o' my heart," exclaimed Alf, "this beats the tales of the dwarf-king Elberich, or the tricks of Gobelín. But I'll be a match for Gray Mantle yet; I'll try how the fire agrees with him, and, if he be, as I shrewdly suspect he is, a limb of the old one, he'll hardly quarrel with his own element."

The condemned goblet was forthwith consigned to a crucible and placed upon the fire, where, to his great surprise, it lay quietly like any ordinary vessel without creating the least disturbance. It was his intention to mould it into half a dozen thin ingots, for, though he got rid of the form, he saw no reason why he should lose the substance. For this purpose he hastily prepared a rough mould, and watched with infinite glee the melting of the metal, as piece after piece fell together and dissolved under the influence of the fire. It seemed to him that he had gained a singular triumph when at last the whole mass was boiling in a bright stream, and, in the pride of his heart, he could not help defying the baffled elf aloud with "What will you do now? Aha!—" But Puck either did not hear, or else disdained to reply, and the liquid metal was poured into the moulds without playing any of the expected

pranks. Due time having been allowed for the silver to cool and harden, Alf now withdrew the sand in which it had been cast, when—wonder of wonders!—in the place of six ingots there were six chalices; each of them, both in size and shape, was a fac-simile of the parent goblet, though it reeked with its own peculiar vintage, either of Champagne, Hock, Claret, Sack, Cyprus, or Canary. Alfred was perfectly astounded; had there been so many goblins instead of goblets, he could not have worn a face of greater longitude, or have uttered a deeper ejaculation of surprise. In the extremity of his despair, he beat his head with both hands, exclaiming, “Alfred! Alfred! you are a doomed man! there is no hope for you except in a tall tree and a running noose, so pluck up a stout heart, and hang yourself forthwith before worse comes of it. Six cups! and every one no doubt full of wine by that delightful—Heaven forgive me!—that accursed perfume, I would say.—Who in the fiend’s name is to live in such company and not get drunk every hour?—I’ll not look at them.”

He flung himself into a chair with his back to the temptation, planting himself in it with the dogged air of one who had screwed his courage to the sticking place. But, though he might exclude the cups from his eyes, he could not so easily shut out the sense of smelling. The odour of the wine still reached him, and after a few minutes’ struggle between fear and desire, it became evident that the latter was like to gain the victory.

“Perhaps,” he said, “perhaps the villains have taken themselves off, and this perfume only comes from the wine they have spilled in their hurry.”

Slowly and cautiously he peeped over his shoulder, like one who is afraid of encountering some object of terror; there sat the immoveable goblets.

With a deep sigh he drew his head back, part of his grief being due to the wine, and part to very great doubts of his own resolution. In truth, it was beginning to waver sadly, as was evident from the way in which he argued the matter with himself.

"If I drink I shall assuredly get drunk; quarter day is not more certain; and, if I get drunk, it is no less sure that I lose Marian; she said so much, and woman's word is a better trust than man's oath."

Again there was a pause, during which he gazed might and main at the green branch of a tree, which was dancing in the breeze before the window.

"However, there can be no great harm in taking a peep at my handywork. Gad, if I could melt crowns, or even half-crowns to the same tune, I should need no other multiplication table: I should be a rare fellow for the king's mint."

He rose and paced cautiously around the cups to the left and to the right, as if he had been some ancient Druid performing his mystic rites of Deasuil and Cartasuil. First he revolved at a respectful distance; then, as if by some secret attraction, his circle narrowed and narrowed while he sniffed up with ineffable delight the odour of the several wines, which, truth to say, was of most bewitching fragrance. Human virtue, or at least the human virtue of poor Alfred, could not long withstand this twice-tripled temptation, assailing two of his senses at the same time. The blister with all its consequences was forgotten, and his hand clutched, it might be said involuntarily, the nearest of the dangerous goblets. A long draught assured him that the wine had not been deteriorated by the melting process; a second, yet longer, only served to confirm the information of the first; his hand being thus fairly in, he thought it useless to stand upon any farther regards, and, giving full swing to his appetites, he gayly tripped from cup



to cup, like a bee buzzing and sipping at so many different flowers.

"I must give the rogues fair play," he thought, "and settle which is to have the post of honour on the shelf, and how am I to do that till I have found which holds the best liquor?" But he was so very fastidious on this point, and so exceedingly anxious to do justice to all parties,—himself, we may suppose, not excepted,—that had the cups been exhaustible, the trial of their merits had ended much as a chancery suit usually does—that is, by the total swallowing up of the thing contested. As it was, he had got very tolerably drunk, when he was startled in his potations by a tap—tap—upon the stairs.

"By all that's awful and ugly, it is the sound of Dame Alice's ivory-headed cane! I should know the cursed ring of it at a league's distance amid the braying of a dozen copper-mills. But, thank heaven, she cannot say I am drunk this time."

And sure enough the door presently opened, when the high-peaked hat and crane-like throat of the old woman protruded themselves at full stretch into the room, while the body remained half hidden on the landing-place. She looked older and uglier than ever,—so at least thought Alfred,—and the more he stared at her the more his brain grew bewildered. At length he doubted her identity; he even fancied that she bore a marvellous resemblance to a half-starved gray goose, hissing at him with extended neck, as those creatures are wont to do when some over-familiar dog offends their dignity by encroaching on their common. Nor was there any thing very extravagant in this idea, as the long lean throat stretched towards him, and the jaw quivered with a sort of palsied motion, muttering he knew not what till he contrived to stammer out, "is

it really and truly you yourself, dame Alice? or are you only a gray goose, hissing and sputtering there from a throat as long as a camel's? speak, you old dromedary."

The antient ladye grinned horribly a ghastly smile.

"Ah!" cried Alf, "I see by that amiable leer it's you—nobody but you—or your friend the old one. By-the-by, Alice, you ought to go into mourning; he's dead."

"Who's dead?" exclaimed Alice; "who's dead, you graceless reprobate?"

"Why, *he*, to be sure—Diabolus himself—I heard them toll the bell at Dewsbury for him with my own ears, as I ought to know—more by token, they do the same thing for him every Christmas, in spite of the vicar, who, I promise you, has a mighty objection to his bells ringing for so unorthodox a personage."

To understand this allusion, it should be known that the people of Dewsbury, in Yorkshire, believe that the devil died on the birthnight of our Saviour, and they toll the bell for him accordingly. At one time a worthy vicar prevailed upon them to forego this custom; but after a brief interval, the sleeping superstition revived in defiance of clerical censure and the dictates of common sense. Alice, who of course knew no more of Dewsbury than she did of the man in the moon, attributed the whole to Alf's invention, and was wroth to a degree.

"Out upon you!" she exclaimed; "out upon you, worthless drunkard!"

"Worthless!" reiterated Alf,—"*Come, I like that, Mistress Alice; at any rate I am worth as much as your old friend, for his market price is only three pounds—you may stare, dame, but it's true notwithstanding, as you'll find if you ever put on your reading*

spectacles. There it is in black and white, in the rolls of the manor of Hatfield ;—how one John de Ithon sold the devil to Robert de Roderham for sixty shillings, and, I take it, if the cunning Yorkshireman could have got more, he would hardly have contented himself with the lesser sum."

"Oh, you vile profligate !" said Alice, withdrawing herself more into the passage.

"So I say," replied Alf—"this John de Ithon was a vile profligate, for, though he took one whole penny as earnest money, he did not keep to his bargain after all. Would you believe it, dame ? when Master Robert demanded possession of Diabolus, as he had good right to do, the rogue refused him livery and seisin. Rob would fain have been even with the false knave and brought his action against him, but the seneschal was afraid of burning his fingers with so fiery a suit, and referred them both to the court below."

"And that's a court you'll have to show your rogue's face in shortly," exclaimed the horrified Alice.

To this adjudication Alf replied by singing, or shouting rather—

Cannikin clink,  
Drink, boys, drink ;  
Under the sun  
Is no such fun

As to sit in the cellar and see the tap run,  
With a brown loaf and a rasher well done.

Alice shook her ivory-topped cane at him, and, without speaking another word, good, bad, or indifferent, suddenly withdrew her head and slammed the door after her.

"Aroynt thee, witch ! aroynt thee !" shouted the triumphant Alf ; "so—being gone, I am a man again

—and I suspect a very drunken one, but no matter for that,

A fig<sup>?</sup> for the world, and a fig for sorrow,  
If we're drunk to day we'll be sober to-morrow,

or the day after—it does not signify which. Passion o' my heart, though! I had forgotten to settle who is the best man among you"—this was addressed to the wine-cups.—“But that I may judge of this matter discreetly and soberly,—no, I am afraid *soberly* is not the word—discreetly and orderly—that I may judge discreetly and orderly, I'll thank you all to take your places; you there, Master Sack; you there, Senor Sherris; holloa, Monsieur Champagne! a little less frisky, if you please, monsieur; and, good monsieur, keep your cap upon your head! you are e'en too wild, and may take cold else.—Down went the lid of the cup:—“Ah! delicate Mistress Burgundy! sweet Mistress Burgundy! I kiss your ripe lips—faith, they smack! they have a relish with them! they make a fellow feel all over in a tremble as it were,—a sort of—I know not what—but mum! I see Mynheer Canary looks askant at us; we shall have him crying out corruption in a minute—Ah, mynheer, mine honest friend—give us thy neuf—what, man, look not so suspicious; I love you with all my heart—with all my heart—believe me, you have no wrong at my hands.”

It was a sight to see when, with the gravity of a judge, he proceeded to deliberate, taking deep draughts first of one wine-cup and then of another, shaking his head after each trial and watching the goblets as if he listened to their respective pleadings. Unluckily the good wine was quicker in doing its office than he was in judgment, and his legs and sight failed before he could settle the question of

priority ; then, sinking on the field of his exploits, he waved the elected chalice over his head, shouting, "What ho ! Burgundy to the rescue !—Champagne, Champagne for ever !"

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### CHAPTER III.

"You have seen fairy land but in a dream."

DECKER.

It has been wisely affirmed by some philosophers that there is not the slightest occasion for any future place of punishment, earth itself being a veritable pandemonium,—if not *the* pandemonium,—where every misdeed, like a condemned schoolboy, carries with it a rod for its own castigation. Certes, it should seem that the worst of sinners needs no other tormentor than the consequences of his own follies and vices, with the pleasing reflections thereupon of Dame Wisdom, who is never so loudly talkative as when the mischief is past and irreparable. With the drunkard, his bitterest enemy could hardly wish a severer or more fitting retribution for the excesses of the night than the visit which, on opening his eyes in the late morning, he is sure to receive from the imps of headach and nausea, while his unstrung frame shivers and trembles at every twitch of the tormenting incubi. Even so it proved with Alfred ; by the time the sun had nearly got through half his day's journey, he awoke both sick and sad, and wise in the same proportion. If he entertained no very deep regret for his excesses, at least he felt shame for his weakness in having been so little able to resist

temptation, and with this too there mixed up something like a feeling of despair for the future. The gold-converting power of Midas did not seem to be a more fatal gift than was this of the goblets.

Ere the sickness of his stomach had quite left him, and consequently while he was yet in his reforming mood, a troop of beggars appeared on the grass-plot before the window of his breakfast-room, and a singular group it was; there were six with bald pates and beards reaching to their girdles; six with wooden legs; six maimed of the right arm; a fourth six blind of the left eye; a fifth with chin and nose so preternaturally elongated that the two prominences almost touched, and, as if they meant to parody the Bacchanals of old, each had his straw hat garlanded with wild hops, and carried moreover a long pole, about which the hop-vines were twining. In the van, a set of motley-dressed urchins, with all sorts of known and unknown instruments, formed a musical band to the ragged regiment, while at the head of this last party marched a beetle-browed fellow, at least six feet without his shoes, forming a most absurd contrast with the diminutive drummers and fifers, who paraded under his shadow like so many toadstools growing beneath an oak. His pigtail dangled from head to heel, with the vibratory motion of a pendulum; his hat was a mighty pent-house, and his clothes, to all appearance, had been fashioned out of a patchwork counterpane, which thrifty article had not been stolen—borrowed only—from some lamenting house-wife. In his hand, by way of substitute for a drum-major's cane, he flourished a bran-new mop, and, as he did not fail to dip it into every puddle that crossed his road, a constant shower fell refreshingly on the heads of his pied and puny followers.

The ragged array, by a dexterous evolution,

formed in a crescent before the window, the extreme left being brought up by the musicians. Nothing, be it said to the praise of the pig-tailed drum-major, could have been more soldierly.

Alfred, who had just been preparing an anchovy to tempt his jaded appetite, dropped the untasted fish again upon his platter, and, flinging himself back into the arm-chair, demanded what they wanted. To this question the mendicants replied, in a choral chant at the very top of their treble voices with a singular dwelling on the first syllable, "mò-ney! mò-ney! mò-ney!" while the basses taking it up grumbled out in the deepest notes, and with the same accent, "mò-ney! mò-ney! mò-ney!"

"Why you infernal scoundrels!" exclaimed Alfred; "one would think you were fresh from a puritan's lecture, where they talk and make a noise, no matter to what purpose. By this light I have a mind—"

But the whole bevy broke in upon him with, "mò-ney! mò-ney! mò-ney!"

This horrible yell was too much for any ears of the usual magnitude. Alfred clapped his hands to his head, so as to exclude all sound, until, by the returning quiet of their jaws, he was assured the din was over, when he addressed himself to one who, from the superior length of his gray beard, might have been the patriarch of the elders.

"Come, bald pate; they say when the old dog barks he gives counsel, so do you answer for yourself and your ragged grandchildren, or rather for your great, great, great grandchildren, since, as I take it, the nearest of them is not in a nearer degree,—what is it you would have of me?"

The patriarch only stared at him with his keen blue eyes, that in their brightness formed a strange contrast with the wrinkles, which welked his face

like the ridges of the sea-sand. For the rest he might have been a man of iron, for not a feature moved, or betrayed the slightest symptoms of intelligence.

"Why don't you speak?" cried Alfred; "answer, you old fool, instead of staring at me like an idiot."

"Dèaf, dumb! dèaf, dumb! dèaf, dumb!" rang out the mendicants, in tones that might easily have been mistaken for a peal of village bells, provided only the same bells had been cracked.

"Would to heavens you were all dumb," cried Alfred, waxing wroth to a degree.

"Shil-lings! shil-lings! shil-lings!" replied the singers as before in full chorus.

"The devil take the whole gang of you, deaf and dumb, lame and blind! I have got no shillings."

"Fàr-things! fàr-things! fàr-things!"

A pulse-fed anchorite, or even the weeping philosopher himself, must have relaxed into the vanity of a smile, at this appeal to the risible part of his nature. As to Alfred, he burst frankly and joyously into a long loud laugh, which continued till his sides ached and his eyes ran over, while the musical mendicants re-echoed it, or rather accompanied it with a ha! ha! ha! ho! ho! ho! as grave and lengthened as the *Dominus vobiscum* of a cathedral choir.

A sudden thought now struck him that he could not do better, if he wished to get rid of the cups, than trust them to the beggars to pawn for him; once in their hands he very reasonably imagined there was but little likelihood of his ever again seeing either the silver or the mendicants. He brought them out, therefore, from the buffet wherein he had hidden them, not from others but from himself, and told the drum-major that, if he would pawn them, he should have half the lendings for his



trouble ; a reluctance to be seen visiting the mansion of the Lombard king was a sufficiently plausible reason for entrusting the commission to another. This proposition was received by the beggar with glistening eyes and ready hand ; but, before he could clutch the goblets, the deaf and dumb patriarch had got a hint of what was going on by some unusual powers of intelligence, and, stepping forward with a simultaneous motion, intercepted the prize. The disappointed drum-major had nothing, as it should seem, left for it, but to submit in silence to this interposition, which doubtless he did not consider a providential one. With a sour aspect he stepped back to his post, hitting the nearest fifer a smart rap on the head by the way for presuming to show his teeth in an ambiguous smile, and then proceeded to give a flourish with his mop-stick. At this signal the band struck up, the troop wheeled into double file, and all marched off the ground with brandished poles, as if they had been going to storm the citadel of the Three balls, and lead my Uncle into captivity.

There was one thing in this transaction which had not a little surprised Alf—the moment the goblets had passed into other hands, the magic fountain within them was dried up, and they became as empty as a summer fish-pond. He had, however, supped too full of wonders, and it might be said breakfasted too, for such a circumstance to dwell long upon his memory.

The sun was now rapidly descending when he went forth as usual to indulge in a walk by the cottage of his mistress, since her father's prohibition excluded him, for the time being, from any acquaintance with its internal arrangements. Here, seated on a low stile, it was his wont to watch for hours together, to all appearance counting the windows or calculating the quantity of smoke that issued

from the chimneys, while his old acquaintance, Colonel, the mastiff, would generally lie at the opposite gate, with his nose between his paws, regarding him with very amiable looks, and now and then by a friendly whine expressing surprise that he did not come over.

The customary preliminaries had taken place,—that is, Colonel had, by a gracious wagging of his tail, invited him to enter, and found his invitation declined, when their interview was disturbed by the appearance of a corpse-light below Marian's chamber. At this sight Colonel gave a long piteous howl and cowered with the consciousness of some invisible presence. Even Alfred started, and when the foreboding flame rose, after quivering in the same spot for a few seconds, and moved off in the direction of the churchyard, he followed with beating heart and a sensation of awe that thrilled him while he scorned it. Was it chance? or was there any thing really supernatural in the meteor? it vanished, or seemed to vanish, into the family vault of the Layton's. Poor as he was, he would gladly have given his last crown that the corpse-light had disappeared into some other part of the burial-ground. And let not the reader smile at this belief of an olden age; the same faith obtains even in these enlightened days through all of Wales and many parts of England.

There are moods, and his was one of them, when a trifle will jar most painfully upon the nerves, which at any other time had passed by unfelt, or at least unnoticed. Upon the flat stone, that covered a humble grave beside a prouder monument, a group of children were playing at marbles with as much unconcern as if the slab had been a part of the common pavement.

"The godless little varlets!" growled a feeble

voice close beside him ; "the doomed to no good and all evil !"

Startled by the suddenness and peculiar tone, Alfred looked up, and saw a bald-headed old man, who coughed violently as he leaned upon his stick, and regarded the urchins with no less spite than sorrow.

"You see them, sir !" said he, addressing Alfred,—"the predestined gallows-birds ! they care not a rush for the dead that sleep below them ; and yet who knows how soon one of their own party may be laid in the same bed, where it is not his mother's cries will wake him ? Old as I am, and roughly as this cough shakes me, I am like enough to see some of them brought here on other legs than their own, and long, it may be, before the bell tolls for myself ; only read the tombstones—how many have died, no older than the youngest of these little wretches ! how few have lived to my age !—I am eighty-two, come next Lammas—ah ! there's much wisdom in a tombstone an a man had the wit to profit by it. Do you know, sir, the churchyard is the only volume I think worth reading now, and every day when the sun is out and the easterly wind does not blow,—ah, that same easterly wind pinches my old bones sorely,—I hobble about here, and turn over the pages of death's big book, and somehow I fancy myself a wiser and a better man."

There was something in the old man's philosophy that grated on the ear of Alfred ; he muttered an indistinct reply, sounding more like rebuke than acquiescence, and hurried off. But, as we have already had occasion to notice, the moods of our reveller came and went with wonderful rapidity, passing at once from sad to gay without any of the intermediate transitions. Before he had reached the high cliffs of Sandrock he was merrily singing one of his own Burgundy inspirations.

What is woman? she's the gem  
Of proud nature's diadem.  
Happy he whose truth can move  
Woman's gentle heart to love;  
Wealth or fame can never give  
Such a cause for man to live;  
Wealth or fame can ne'er supply  
Such a cause for man to die.  
Woman! she's the noblest gem  
Of proud nature's diadem.

Clouds of summer lightest wreathing,  
Flowers of summer sweetest breathing,  
Diamonds of the mine when rarest,  
Stars when they are shining fairest—  
All are faint to image forth  
Woman's beauty, woman's worth;  
She's the richest, noblest gem  
Of proud nature's diadem.

Just as he was coming back on a da capo, his song was interrupted by a scene worthy of the pencil of Salvator Rosa. It was by this time the darkest hour of twilight, when, on rounding a prominence, he came suddenly upon the camp of the gipsies, or mendicants, or whatever else might be the singular horde that had visited him in the morning. A wilder spot than this did not exist in the whole island. Time, or the wants of the people, as they went on building, had excavated the gray limestone rocks that hung threateningly over-head, where they were almost joined by the tops of the trees, which shot up from below. Beneath this canopy all had been darkness but for the light of their charcoal fires, for the last glimmerings of day were much too faint to penetrate it. From their numbers it should have seemed the whole gang had assembled for the night, and their occupations were as various as the patches on their motley garments. Some were employed in cooking their supper, others were busy in making snares, some diced and swore, others played at cards and swore no less. In a corner sat an old paralytic,

with slavering mouth and eyes red with rheum, who cowered over the fire and seemed by his idiotic grin and muttered exclamations to find in its heat the last enjoyment insensibility had left him. A parcel of urchins flitted around, playing him all manner of ungracious pranks, as though he had been one of the damned, and they the appointed imps of torture ; one, more malicious than the rest, fastened upon him with his teeth till they met, upon which an old crone seized the offender and hurled him through the air, to fall on the hard rock, where he lay, bleeding at the mouth, yet without uttering a groan, and still glaring with aimless malignity. The palsy-stricken only nodded his head more vehemently, and grinned more frightfully in a sort of half unconsciousness of what had passed.

In another nook, canopied over with a ragged blanket on hoops, lay a poor wretch, who was evidently dying, and with no slight struggling of the reluctant spirit. All that was visible of him was wasted to a skeleton, and the firelight flickered strangely on his blue lips and writhing features, but no one seemed to notice him, except when at times in his agony he groaned, and then the dicers, swearing a deep oath, would bid him not disturb their play by his infernal bellowings. By his head sat a large black cat, her eyes gleaming with a green and yellow light in the partial shadow, and fixed intently on him ; at times she would utter a low, wild cry,—it might be of pain, it might be of impatience,—that sounded strangely to the ears of Alf ; but whether the creature watched there from attachment, or whether it was the foul fiend waiting in that form for his prey, might have been a question with any one who had suddenly stumbled on a scene so nearly akin to the supernatural.

Even more than these did two strange groups attract his attention. The first was a set of malignant

beldames with naked feet and bare arms, each carrying in her hand a hazel-rod, round which was twined a snake, or the resemblance of a snake. From the masses of rock that lay scattered about they had piled up a rude altar, and upon this burnt a greenish flame throwing a ghastly light upon all within its influence. Tucking up their short garments yet higher, they now paced round it, hand in hand, chanting a sort of magical invocation, which, as nearly as Alfred could collect it, ran thus—

## INCANTATION.

Around, around, around!  
We pace this blasted ground;  
Lo! we call thee once and twice!  
Falcon, we have called thee thrice.  
From thy rocky nest we spy  
Sparkles forth thy charmed eye;  
Wait not till a blacker spell  
Shall to earth thy wing compel.

Something was flung into the fire, which immediately blazed up into a lofty pyramid, scattering its light to the very top of the rock, and there, sure enough, peeped out the bright eye of the falcon, who gazed fiercely, yet with troubled glance, on the group below. Still the bird showed no signs of moving, and again the hags commenced their wild rhymes.

## INCANTATION RESUMED.

Around, around, around!  
To our feet's unhallowed sound:  
Falcon, though thine eye is bright,  
There is trouble in its light;  
Vainly, in uneasy rest,  
Folds thy wing upon thy breast;  
Down, ere morn unclasps the bud;  
Earth is thirsting for thy blood.

The angry bird reluctantly rustled from its eyrie, apparently under the influence of some fascination, and descended in quick gyrations to the altar, when it was instantly pounced upon by the hags and sacrificed.

The second group interested him yet more nearly; this consisted of the patriarchs, who seemed most miraculously to have recovered both speech and hearing, and were employed in scouring six goblets. The eldest of the band, after a vehement rubbing at his cup, flung it down in despair, and growled out,

"Pewter, by the red dog-star! had I the cheat here I would paint him gules, till the mother who bore him should not know her own bastard."

"Pewter, by the hot plague!" exclaimed the second; "had I the villain here, I would cut the liver out of his body and give it to the dogs"—and in token of his purpose he hewed fiercely with his knife at the table before him till the splinters flew again.

"Pewter, by the black devil!" cried the third; "had I the doomed one here, I would hang him by the heels till the blood gushed from his mouth, and his groans awoke the mandrake."

"Pewter, by the depths of Gehenna!" yelled a fourth; "had I—"

But Alfred, who recognised in the abused vessels the form of his own goblets, though he could not conceive by what process they had been transmuted into pewter, quickly understood that he was the devoted subject of all these maledictions: as he had no mind to give them an opportunity of realizing their benevolent purposes, he instantly began to steal off, using as much speed as was compatible with silence. Unluckily, he was spied in his retreat by a watchful urchin, who, putting both hands to his

mouth, gave a ferocious war-whoop, not unworthy of a tribe of Indians. Up started the whole bevy, and away ran Alfred with the utmost swiftness of an excellent pair of legs, the gray-beards leading the pursuit, and soon distancing their younger followers as much as they themselves were distanced by the fugitive. A few minutes showed them that the chase was hopeless, and, hurling the goblets after him, they retreated to their tents beneath the cliff.

It might have been presumed that Alf's troubles would now be over; far from it; the cups had apparently learned the secret of the perpetual motion, for they continued bounding along at a prodigious rate, and kept up a furious clatter at his heels, pouring a shower of blows upon him; that he might have mistaken for a hail-storm had the missiles been of more moderate dimensions. Once or twice he was tempted to face about and do battle with the enemy; but the pewter gentlemen were too cunning for him; turn which way he would, one half of their divided forces kept up an incessant fire on his flank and rear; and when, by a masterly stroke of generalship, he managed to confine the battle to his front, and leaned against a near oak, they lost not a jot of their audacity, but flew up like a pack of yelping hounds; then it was rap, rap, rap, rap, and the noise of the metal goblets, ringing upon the rock, as they rebounded from his head, bore no very distant resemblance to the cry of infuriated curs when worrying some object of which they are half afraid. A very brief taste of this discipline was sufficient to convince him that the better part of valour is discretion, and, taking to his heels again, the chase went on right merrily as before. At length the whole party entered his cottage, pell-mell, when the cups, after a slight struggle among themselves for precedence, settled down into



their respective seats with the strictest gravity and decorum.

Anger was naturally enough the first feeling with Alfred when he sat down, out of breath from the speed of his flight, and sore all over from his recent pommelling. The absurdity of the adventure next took possession of his changeful fancy, and, even while his bones ached, he could not help bursting into a hearty fit of laughter, that gradually gave way to delight, when he beheld the goblets filling as before, each with its own peculiar vintage. Should he again turn them out of doors? it was uncivil,—it was useless. But then he determined to indulge moderately, very moderately, in his potations; and in virtue of this vow, by the end of a single hour, he was tipsy in the third degree, counting the gradations of drunkenness as thus,—first, fresh; secondly, emphatic; thirdly, glorious; fourthly, uproarious; and lastly, insensible.

This revel was most unexpectedly interrupted by the appearance of a visiter, who at any other time had been more than welcome, but who just now was precisely the very last person he could have wished to darken his door-way; this was Marian; she had protracted a moonlight walk to a late hour, and, stumbling upon the haunt of the gipsies, their importunities had been so alarming as to make her seek a refuge in the near cottage of her lover. Alf's state was too evident to escape detection for a single instant. In utter despair at this farther proof of his incurable propensity to drunkenness, she clasped her hands, and, without saying a word, was hurrying out of the cottage, when Alf caught her by the arm. In truth, he was elevated by the good Burgundy above all considerations, that being a characteristic of the third, or glorious state of wine-bibbing.

"What!" he exclaimed; "part dry-lipped every way? not a cup? not a kiss? the foul fiend take me then! It's no use your looking so vicious, Marian; I know I'm drunk, and drunkenness is one of the seven damnable sins; but how could I help it? it is all the effect of drinking—drinking—drinking!"

And he turned up his eyes with the ecstatic piety of a preacher to the elect, the saints of modern days.

Marian disengaged herself by a sudden effort from his grasp, and, flinging on him a look of contempt and loathing, walked off without vouchsafing a further parley. For a moment Alf stood gazing at the open door with very sagacious looks, and much inclined to set down this natural event among the seven wonders of Dauphiné; his next impulse was to follow his mistress, and forth he sallied, calling upon her both in prose and verse to return and join him in his festival, from which many may be inclined to infer that he had passed the glorious state and had entered no little way upon the uproarious. Thus then he sang, interrupted now and then by a vinous hiccough—

"Where art thou going, lady fair?  
Though the moon's bright  
'Tis a blustering night,  
And I have part of a couch to spare."

Marian only walked the faster.

"Won't that do?" cried Alfred; "we must try another charm then—

'Come to me! Oh, come to me,  
Where no jealous eye shall see  
How we live, and how we love,  
While the winking stars above  
Twinkle down right merrily—  
Come to me! Oh come to me!"

Again Marian quickened her pace.

"You won't? well then I must come to you, I suppose."

But on seeing him begin to run, Marian, who feared the rudeness of his intoxication, did the same, and as the wine made his legs unsteady and his path tortuous, he was soon left behind in this moonlight chase. Suddenly,—was it reality or was it the illusion of his senses?—the trees trembled, not as when shaken by the wind, but with a reeling motion of the whole trunk. The hills too laboured with some strange convulsion. Then came a sound, at first hollow and distant, but as it rattled rapidly along through the very bowels of the earth, it grew sharper, louder, wilder, till at last it burst into a deafening roar that was perfectly appalling. In the very height and clamour of these subterranean thunders, a portion of cliff, enough to form a huge bank, detached itself from the mainland, and began rolling and sliding down towards the beach. Alf was fixed to the spot by strong horror, for Marian stood nearly in the centre of this descending mountain. The moment she felt the ground thus reeling from under her she uttered shriek upon shriek, flinging her hands frantically for aid, and running to instead of from him. But the chasm between them grew wider and wider—the waves rushed up into it, foaming and roaring—the descent of the mass was frightfully accelerated—and down it swept with a horrid crash of trees and rocks into the sea below. Immediately a cloud of dust arose from the concussion, which hung for a time over the ruins, and made them half invisible, while the displaced waters boiled, and hissed, and tossed the spray far above the cliffs, which in this place were six hundred feet high, or even more. Thus at least the whole scene showed itself to Alf, and he was not dreaming,

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neither did he see it through the mists of intoxication. In fact there could be little doubt of its being what the islanders term a *landslip*, of which there are many instances, both old and recent, in the history of Vectis.

Alf had heard the despairing cry of Marian, and seen her wild gestures for aid as she was borne away by the falling mass, but he was too far off to help her, even had he not been overwhelmed as he was by horror, and, when he came to the edge of the new precipice, her fate was sealed. Without allowing himself a moment for consideration he hastily descended the ragged cliff, and for a time paid little attention to the slipping of the resting-places beneath his feet, or the tumbling of the loose masses from above, that threatened to sweep him away as they came thundering by him. By the time, however, he had got half way down, his strength began to fail, the difficulties to increase, and he was now made fully alive to the perils of his situation. The seagulls and curlews, startled from their nests by the landslip, and mazed by the unaccustomed moonlight, whirled and screamed around him in dizzy eddies, almost flapping him with their wings, and the nightwind, rising in fitful gusts, beat so fiercely on him that he could with difficulty maintain his hold. He put out his foot, but it found no resting-place—the other—it was still the same, and for the first time a sense of fear and doubt came over him. He looked above—to his dizzy sight the rough points of the cliff took on all manner of grotesque and horrid shapes of owls, and bats, and monkeys, and gigantic worms that clustered in knots like the roots of some huge oak, or writhed and twisted and pointed their heads as if about to crawl upon his face. He looked below—three hundred feet of empty space lay between him and the land-

slip. That one gaze was enough. His brain tottered, and in the very desperation of safety, an invisible impulse led him, as it often does in frightful dreams, to let go his hold, and brave the worst at once. Down he went, crash—crash—against the many projecting points left by the uneven rending of the rocks, when fortunately one, larger and firmer than the rest, stayed him in his descent, bruised indeed, yet with unbroken limbs. Here for a few minutes he lay on his back, sick and almost breathless, his head throbbing as if it would break, gazing on the stars, that reeled to and fro in a mad, dizzy dance, and on the moon, that from a lifeless orb appeared to grow into an animated being, who looked down upon him, half in mockery, half in menace. To avoid these dazzling sights he forcibly closed his eyes, when immediately his ears rang with the rush of many waters, and he felt as if being whirled around.

A few minutes passed thus—to him they seemed hours,—when, these feelings gradually subsiding, his spirits rallied in proportion, and he again ventured on his perilous descent. More than once he was in imminent danger of being dashed to pieces, but his good fortune, or his hardy habits, brought him through all hazards safely to the ground.

Upon reaching the fallen mass, that lay on the sand like some mighty avalanche, beaten all around by the troubled waters, he found a party of fishermen preparing to place Marian on a sort of litter, which they had hastily formed of oars and boat-hooks crossed. It was a piteous sight for any one who was not utterly destitute of feeling, and madness for one who loved as Alf had loved. Her face was dreadfully mangled, her whole dress was covered with mud and gore, the legs hung down to all appearance broken, and one arm was smashed

into an unsightly mass of flesh and blood and splintered bone. Upon attempting to move her the cries she uttered were truly frightful, and cut to the heart of Alf, who peremptorily ordered them to desist. The leader of the party, a stout young fellow, remonstrated against this mandate with all the bluntness of a seaman, much more anxious for the right than careful of offence.

"Why, look you, Master Alfred, I know you mean it all for the best, seeing as how the poor thing's your sweetheart, but you are a d—d bad pilot notwithstanding. What's the use, think you, of letting her lie here to die like a mangy tyke?—and a squall coming on too! if you don't get her into some port she'll founder before the night's over, or my name's not Mike Scovel."

There was obvious truth in Mike's remark, however coarsely uttered, and turning away with an unutterable pang, Alf signed his assent to her removal. Not a groan followed. He turned round again, and saw, by the deadly pallor of her motionless features, that she had fainted; the happiest thing probably which could chance in such a situation.

If any thing could have added to his anguish, it would have been the scene that followed on reaching her father's dwelling. The door was opened by Alice, who had been anxiously on the watch for her dear Marian, imagining all sorts of mishaps, though none half so frightful as the sad reality. Her screams, the moment she saw the pale, bloody face, brought down the doctor, whose professional calmness was hardly proof against a shock like this, and it was with a faltering voice that he bade them convey her up stairs to her bedroom.

Amid the horrors of the accident and the bustle of moving the poor girl, a hundred hasty questions extorted from Alf the tale of what had happened.

The old man turned from the bed, on which he had just helped to lay the insensible Marian, and with uplifted hands cursed him as the murderer of his child—his dear, innocent child, whose only fault was her attachment to a worthless drunkard. This example loosened the tongue of Alice; she assailed him with all the innate bitterness of her nature, foaming at the mouth, stamping with her feet, and shaking her clenched hands at him with impotent malice. He attempted to reply. The doctor, his voice choking with emotion, peremptorily bade him leave the house, and the conscience-stricken Alf awaited not a second mandate. Mechanically he found his way down the stairs, followed by the relentless Alice, who closed the door upon him with a wish that his death might be by the rope or in a lazaret-house.

There is an agony of the heart, passing all that imagination can supply or that language can describe, and which must be felt to be rightly understood. Such was Alfred's. He tore not his hair, as men in extreme grief will do, he did not even shed a tear, but he sat himself down in cold and blank despair on the stone beneath Marian's window. The wind whistled hollowly across the bare downs, yet he heard it not; the rain, which had so long threatened, now began to fall and beat sharply against his face, yet he was unconscious of it; every sense was wound up to the highest pitch and lent itself with painful intenseness to what was passing within the cottage. He watched the lights flit to and fro till all the bustle of the house seemed to be concentrated in Marian's chamber, the window of which was imperfectly screened by a white rolling blind. Upon this thin medium the shadows of those within were indistinctly visible, and the uncertainty supplied that key-note, at which the fancy is ever sure to start off

into its wildest and most fearful melodies. He saw their movements and imagined their occupations as the dim outlines traversed the room or paused in momentary consultation, his blood-shot eyes aching with the eagerness of his gaze. There was evident confusion in the chamber, by the quick crossing of the shadows and the flitting of the lights. One figure stood apart from the rest, seeming to make many rapid gestures. Was it not the old woman wringing her hands, unable to bear the approaching catastrophe? Marian is surely dying! no, again the single figure joins the others, and they all stand motionless about the bed,—they must be setting and bandaging the broken limbs; there is hope then! Alf clasped his hands and looked up to the heavens, where from a small blue space amid the dark and rolling clouds a single star peeped out brightly, and—alas poor human nature!—he hailed it as an omen of her recovery and wept aloud.

All was yet quiet in the sick room though the attendants had increased in number. Were the necessary operations over, or were they yet to do? time enough had elapsed, at least when counted by the anxious pulses of one, who watched as Alf was watching. Hush! hark!—no; all is still!

In the midst of this silence a piercing cry broke upon the startled night. Great God! what are they doing with her?—a second yet more tortured!—a third in the highest note of human agony, and the voice seemed to break in uttering it. Then the shadows flitted to and fro, and doors were hastily slammed, and lights glanced through the house from window to window, like so many meteors playing about a fen. But after a time this again subsided into a frightful calm, the figures appearing to be gathered about the sick bed. Alf's heart throbbed



to bursting, and something rose up to his throat as if he were being suffocated.

In these alternations of fear and hope, tears and smiles, the night had waned. From the near village-church the clock successively struck one! two! three!! four!!! and still the wind blew and the rain beat upon the agonized watcher. But sleep, short and broken, came over him at times, and closed his eyes for a few brief minutes, in despite of his mental sufferings and the stormy weather that dealt so rudely with his exhausted frame. Then he would dream of green fields and the murmuring of pleasant streams, only to wake up again to a keener sense of misery.

From one of these short unrefreshing slumbers he was startled by a sudden burst of the storm. The rain fell in torrents, and he found himself on waking as thoroughly drenched by it as if he had been dragged out after an hour's immersion in the Solent; but, though the cold had struck to the very marrow of his bones, his first thought was given to the window of Marian's chamber; alas! there was the old nurse, sobbing as though her heart would break, and putting to the shutters. As leaf after leaf was closed, Alf's soul sickened within him, and when the last folds were brought together, he stretched out his hands to the stormy heavens, and cried aloud, in the saddest accents of reproach and grief, "She is dead! —the young! the beautiful! the innocent! —and she is dead!"

For three days Alf neither ate, nor drank, nor slept. On the fourth morning his friend David, fearing for his life, sought to tempt him with one of the goblets that reamed with noble Burgundy, but he turned from it in disgust and horror. The passion for wine had passed away for ever.

The seventh morning came, and the bell that sum-

moned Marian to her last home spoke out sternly to the ears of Alf. By an almost superhuman effort he rose from his sick bed, and tottered towards the church-yard, where the hearse had not yet appeared. The sexton, however, stood by the grave, and close at hand, leaning on his staff, was the old moralist, whose dull eye lit up with a strange joy when he was aware of Alf.

"Did I not say so, sir?" he exclaimed, striking his cane triumphantly against the ground; "did I not say so? They will tell you the old man's staff is the rapper at death's door, and yet you see here's another young thing coming to the dark house, while I am alive and heartier than I was a week ago. Ah! when the wind blows it isn't always the ripest fruit that falls; your green ones will often drop first. Poor thing! I could be sorry for her if it were worth while being sorry for any thing in this world, but it is not when a man gets to my years. Ah! eighty-two am I, come next Lammas, and she, the sexton tells me, was only eighteen! Well, well; she has seen the less of sin and sorrow, and is the likelier to go to heaven!"

Alf made no reply; his heart was too full; but at the moment all his past of life rushed at once upon his brain, overleaping space and time, and converging into one focus like the rays from a burning-glass—he withered beneath its fire.

The bell tolled, and its first vibration was to him an electric shock, that made his mortal building tremble to its very centre. The coffin approached. It was uncovered, and Alf smiled as he read the inscription on the lid, but it was the horrid smile that will often relax the lips of grief in its wilder moments. The coffin was lowered into the grave, and every head was instantly bare save Alf's, who still gazed eagerly on the plate, and heard nothing, not

even the voice of the priest, till, at the sublime command of "dust to dust," the earth rattled on the lid. He could bear no more. His ear was filled with an agony of sounds; his eyes seemed to be violently forced open; his whole frame was stretched as if it had been pulled at and torn asunder by wild horses; he heard the bones snapping, cracking, splitting, and—HE AWOKE FROM THE TRANCE OF FOURTEEN DAYS. By his couch, for he lay dressed upon a sofa, stood Dr. Layton and his daughter, both of whom witnessed his recovery with visible emotion. The doctor was fain to take a long pinch of snuff, and Marian wept outright, while old Alice peeped over her shoulder with a grim smile.

"Marian! dear Marian!" exclaimed the bewildered Alf, seizing her hand, "is it indeed you? are you in truth unhurt? I saw you fall so plainly! I saw the coffin too; I heard the ominous voice of the priest, the rattling of the earth upon the lid,—Eternal powers! I must be going mad!"

He flung himself back on the sofa, and covered his face with both hands. Marian seemed confounded.

"Heed it not, girl," said the doctor; "heed it not; this is no more than was to be expected; he'll come to in a few minutes. But you see my theory is correct, quite correct, and people in a trance do dream notwithstanding the parson's orthodox doctrine as he calls it—an old fool!—yes, I maintain that the A.M. which he tacks to the end of his name, means *Asinorum Magister*, the Master of Asses, and does not and cannot signify any thing besides."

"But Alf, my dear father!" said the anxious Marian—"he still looks so wildly!"

"Natural enough," replied the doctor; "he has

been dreaming, no doubt, of all manner of strange things in his trance,—you may infer so much from his words—and for the moment they make such an uproar in his brain that he is puzzled to divide the false from the real.”

Alf started up—

“Have I then been in a trance all the time? Have I seen no Gray Man?—no silver goblets?—no landslip?—no Puck?—no—

“Sessa! sessa, my young friend!” cried the doctor; “your tongue has gotten into a false gallop that would puzzle mortal ears to follow it. A landslip there has been,—and a terrible one too—though I rather suspect you can’t have seen much of it as you have been lying entranced on this sofa for the last fortnight, a state not particularly favourable to the observation of natural phenomena. You may have dreamed of it indeed, and it is somewhat odd that your dream should jump so exactly with what really did happen. But things no less strange fall out every day. As to your Gray Man and his goblets—ahem! I would advise you to set them down with the legends of Friar Bacon and the sad doings of Kontius.”

Still Alf could not altogether persuade himself that he had only dreamed, so vivid had been the pictures. The doctor explained—Marian explained—Alice explained—Alf was only more bewildered and bedeviled than before. Then the doctor enlarged upon his theory of trances—Marian laughed and cried alternately—Alice pursed up her brows and scolded, that being her favourite mode of settling all disputed topics; it was still to no purpose; like most expounders of hidden mysteries, they contrived to make the dark yet darker, thus much only appearing plain amid the confusion, and that not being elicited without some trouble—Marian, super-

stitious as were all the islanders, believed in Puck as faithfully as she did in her looking-glass, and had resolved to see if the tricky spirit could or would cure her lover of his inordinate predilection for wine, the usual remedies of scolding, crying, and beseeching having proved utterly ineffectual. With this view she had paid a visit to Puck-pool, the supposed residence of the merry elf, and had tried by every possible mode of coaxing and teasing to evoke him from his home beneath the waters.

"I trust he had the politeness to come when called upon by so wise a damsel," said the doctor, dryly; "of course you saw your goblin?"

Marian could not exactly say she had, but then it was not the less evident that he had heard and complied with her requests.

"Ay, indeed! and how so?" retorted the doctor.

"Why was it not in the evening of the same day that Alf fell into the trance, which, according to his own account, has read him so excellent a lesson?"

Though her eyes were wet with tears, yet there was a peculiar, arch smile about Marian's rosy mouth, while she told this tale of wonder, that with some folks might have brought its truth in question; as to old Alice she lifted up her hands in most orthodox admiration; but the doctor, eying the maiden shrewdly, and giving a preliminary tap on his box, asked in his usual quaint tone,—“rogue, or simpleton, daughter mine? which, for a ducat?—But no matter; if the patient be only cured of his wine-bibbing propensities, we'll not quarrel though a quack was his physician.”

Six months were allowed to try the new-born virtue of Alf. It stood the test. At the end of that time he led Marian to the altar amid the general joy of the island, and on a day of unusual brilliance for the time of year, every thing connected

with Alf seeming more or less to partake of the wonderful ; though it was the close of the autumn, the sun shone out brightly from a cloudless sky, and the air had all the mildness of a warm spring morning. No one, of course, in these philosophic days, will believe that Puck had any thing to do with the weather, nor did Alf waste a thought on the merry sprite till, on leaving the church, he found himself surrounded by a troop of beggars, who in all respects resembled the mendicants of his trance, except that they clamoured for relief much as others of the tribe are wont to do. Not one of them, however, when he put the question, would own to having seen him before, and he passed on, after having bestowed a hasty alms, not a little perplexed by the similitude.

Yet greater was his astonishment when he introduced his bride to her new home ; six silver cups were glittering on the table, fac-similes of the elfin goblets, with this difference only, as it proved upon their being put to the test,—they were deficient in the very useful quality of replenishing themselves. A sudden qualm came over Alf at this third coincidence ; Marian smiled ; Alice puckered her old whelked face into a thousand deeper wrinkles ; the doctor only tapped his box and took a prodigious pinch of snuff. It was odd ; very odd. If Puck, as Alf doubted and Marian protested, was indeed at the bottom of this ravelled skein, it must be confessed that he had twisted it to some purpose ; so cleverly had the rogue contrived to blend the false with the real, that by no alchymy of human wit could they be distinguished.

For some time Alf endeavoured to read this riddle, harder than that solved whilome by the blind king of Thebes ; but, finding the more he thought upon it, the more his brain went round like the wheels of

a windmill on a gusty day, he was at last fain to give up the unprofitable labour. To this course he was the more inclined, as all his thoughts were occupied by Marian, who proved the best of wedded dames, as she had ever been the fairest of unwedded maidens.

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“Have I, or have I not found the riddle?” said Puck in soliloquy, as he sat self-balanced on the rays that shot from the descending sun. “I think I will return to Faërie.”

But still he moved not, and the beams, slanting off in the direction of Beaulieu, brought him nearer and nearer to the earth without any effort on his own part, while the golden motes kept whirling round, and formed an ever-changing coronet about his brows. At length the sun declined below the waters of the west, and the parting ray left him by the Lepe.

“How beautiful!” he exclaimed; “Elf-land has nothing half so lovely!”

But he spoke not of the crimson sky, nor of the river that blushed in its reflected glow, nor of the green forest that smiled so sweetly, yet so sadly, in the dying light;—it was a mortal maiden, scarcely eighteen years of age, whose exquisite perfection both of form and feature well-nigh defied a parallel; for to what could you have compared her eyes? the diamond was not so brilliant—or her lips? the lips of the rose were not so rich a scarlet—or her form? the lily did not bend so gracefully before the winds of evening. Puck gazed a while in ecstasy, and when he spoke his words were tremulous with delight.

“One lesson more ere I return to Faërie,—yet  
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one more,—and this human mortal, so rare in her beauty that I could gaze upon her till I forgot there was either earth or sky—she shall be my instructress.”

Night now unfolded her wings and sank down in darkness upon the earth, like a vulture overshadowing the prey it has struck ; and a deep-mouthed bell, which seemed to speak from the inmost recesses of the New Forest, sent forth a heavy summons to all that the day was over.



**THE FROLICS OF PUCK.**

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**FROLIC THE FOURTH.**



## FROLIC THE FOURTH.

SAINT LEONARD'S.

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### CHAPTER I.

*Jo.* They're rid a hunting,  
*Do.* Hare or deer, my Lord?  
RANDOLPH.

THE first month of winter had set in, dry, clear, and cold, with that breeziness of the air which is so peculiarly grateful to youth and health, bracing the nerves while it tints the cheek, and in its freshness far surpassing the perfumed breath of summer. The forest rivers rolled in a fuller tide, though their waters reflected only leafless trees, except when here and there a sturdy oak still held out a few yellow fragments to the wind, like the tattered sails of some goodly bark that has been stricken by the tempest.

As the leaves dropped, so had the lovers of Emily Monkton fallen off, one by one, either hopeless of success or weary of her caprices, till at length only three remained from the long catalogue of her wooers. These had motives, each peculiar to himself, of sufficient force to outbalance all other considerations. Cornelius Ashted had an eager appetite for gold, and the heiress was rich; Theodore Rain-

ham was devoted to beauty, and the fair one was said far and wide to be without a parallel; and Sir William o' the Fens,—the Lord of the Fens, Emily was wont to call him,—being to the full as fantastic as the damsel, it should almost seem was in love with her very caprices. He could be sad with her sadness, merry with her mirth, wrathful with her wrath, or cold with her coldness, and all in the space of one short half-hour; so that uncle Joseph, who was the guardian of the orphan beauty, and indulged her in all her humours, would often say to the elder lovers, “by my faith, sirs, but you two are in a hopeful way; just borrow my spectacles for a few minutes, and you will see the Lord of the Fens has won my girl's heart, and will win her hand too before the leaves are green again, or fair face and smooth tongue hold not their usual price with woman.” At this augury Cornelius would turn pale, and sigh in sad forebodings of the treasure he was likely to lose. Theodore would mentally comfort himself with the old proverb, which says, “there are as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it;” while as to the little maiden, she would pout her lips on such occasions, and treat the Lord of the Fens to a double portion of caprice for days afterward, from no other motive that any one could discover than the mere love of contradiction.

Such was the party that set off to join the chase in the New Forest on one of those glorious mornings that send new life and energy to the heart of man and brute. The horses, tossing their heads and champing on the bit till the foam flew again, seemed to participate in their riders' eagerness for the sport; and when the sound of the huntsman's horn first broke upon them, their fine frames actually shivered with a sudden thrill of delight.

The whole hunt, following the guidance of the

hounds, now plunged into the depths of the forest. By the side of the maiden rode her loving trio, each anxious to ingratiate himself and supplant his rival; and even when the hounds gave tongue they did not forget to maintain their places. But few things are of more absorbing interest than the chase. The horse that bore Emily, though in general the swiftest of the swift, began most unaccountably to show symptoms of distress and weariness; and when rider after rider had in consequence passed them, Cornelius could no longer restrain his impatience—

“By Jove!” he cried, “but we shall get the wooden spoon, as they say at Cambridge;” and, giving his mare her head, he was quickly among the foremost.

“Yoicks! yoicks for Cambridge!” shouted Theodore, “he rides like any tailor. As I live by bread though, the bookworm will be in at the death.”

And he too, hurried away by the spirit of the chase, forgot his mistress, and plunged the spurrowels deep into his horse’s flanks, an appeal that made the high-blooded animal well-nigh frantic.

“What can be the matter with Sunbeam to-day?” said Emily to the Lord of the Fens, who, being either a colder sportsman or a warmer lover than his rivals, still kept beside her; “he always used to be first in the field, and now he lags behind them all—even that half-bred brute the miller rides on, shows more mettle.

“Sunbeam is in my interest,” said the Lord of the Fens, laughing; “he loiters behind that I may have an opportunity of asking the old question, can you love me?”

“I’ll do my best,” said the damsel, mockingly, and again urged on her horse—“Oh Sunbeam! Sunbeam! you have disgraced both yourself and me for

ever; we shall not dare to show ourselves in the field again."

The poor animal seemed to hear and understand the appeal, for he put forward all his strength to regain his companions, till just as he came to a gentle knoll, that was surmounted by a little forest-stream and studded with oaks, he stumbled over the tangled roots of an old oak, with a force that brought himself to the ground, and threw his rider to some distance upon a heap of leaves, which had been piled together by the children in their gambols.

In an instant Sir William had dismounted; but, quick as he was, the light and active little maiden had anticipated his aid, and was already on her feet: as to fear, she was so totally unacquainted with it, that the fall did not for a moment rob her cheek of its colour. The Lord of the Fens was astonished, and could not help observing that he had seen many a bearded man look pale for as slight a cause.

"I do not doubt it," replied Emily; "all you men are by nature cowards; it is only excessive vanity, and a proneness to wrangle, that make you what you are; were it not for these two excellent qualities, the boldest of you would think twice before he adventured his person in opposition to a bulrush. But setting aside these nice questions, how are we to get back to Beaulieu? it must be twenty miles off at least."

"Good faith, I know not," replied the Lord of the Fens, "unless indeed we could borrow a pair of wings from one of these same black gentlemen that are cawing so merrily in the tree-tops. But, hark! there's help at hand."

As he spoke, a swineherd's horn rang hoarsely through the forest, and, almost before its echoes had died away, a Hampshire Eumæus and his boy appeared from the twisted underwood, followed by a

flock of swine, which they were leading forth to pasture on the beech-mast. On seeing their dilemma, the peasant offered to take the lame hunter on to Lyndhurst, which was only three miles off, and borrow a fresh horse from some of the farmers, a proposition that was vehemently seconded by Sir William, who had thus before him the pleasant prospect of an hour alone with Emily ; nor did the little damsel make any violent objection to this plan, though she smiled sagaciously at his counsel, and held up her finger in playful menace. Accordingly the herdsman marched off with Sunbeam, and, the boy sounding his horn, at the very first note his swinish followers began to grunt and scamper, and in a few minutes the whole party was lost to sight in the deeper recesses of the forest.

"All laud and honour to my friend, Sunbeam !" cried the knight, as the boy disappeared ; "thanks to his good management, we are alone together for the first time !"

"And for the last," said Emily, slightly blushing.

"No," said the knight.

"Yes," replied the maiden.

"Well, then, I have the greater reason to make the most of the present opportunity. In as few words as may be, will you accept me for,—the word has an ugly sound with it, but it must be spoken,—for your husband ?"

"Oh all ye Dryads and Hamadryads !" exclaimed Emily, with an air of mockery, though there was a confusion in her manner that showed the question was not quite so indifferent to her as she pretended—"here is another of my devoted servants about to take wing—well-a-day ! I shall be left shortly without a single lover, and then what shall I have to laugh at ?"

"Laugh ?" said the knight, choosing to misunderstand her—"by my faith, I am quite serious."

"By *my* faith, then, I admire your assurance ; a pretty proposal truly from a landless knight to the heiress of Ralph Monkton !"

"Not landless—you forget the fens."

"I have no mind to be the lady of them."

"Tilly vally," said the knight ; "all this is a false copy of your heart. I know you value gold no more than the dew-drops that your foot is brushing away from the grass."

"And if it be so," said the maiden, quickly, "where shall I find one of your lordly sex with as frank a humour ? wo is me ! the poor fox that we have been hunting to the death this morning is less to be pitied than the devoted heiress. The knave, the fool, the bankrupt, the spendthrift, all join in the pursuit of her with one common cry ; she can trust to none."

"To none ?" repeated the knight.

"To none !" replied Emily ; "the peasant-girl may hope for love, but where—where shall the poor child of deceased wealth look for it ?"

It was not usual for the Lord of the Fens to look grave upon any subject, but for once he wore an anxious brow. At length he said, "How, if I could convince you of my sincerity ?"

"I wish you could," sighed the maiden—"and to speak it frankly—perhaps too frankly—I wish it for my own sake ; but no, such conviction is not in the tongue of mortal. Say what you would, I should still think it was the heiress, and not Emily Monkton, who was the object of your eloquence. Alas for me ! I cannot help it."

"But if I could prove that I care not for wealth, and woo only the kind heart and fair feature ?"

"You may as easily make this oak put on its summer foliage, now that winter has just stripped the last leaf from it."

"*That* too were not impossible."



"As possible as the other, certainly, yet both beyond your power."

"Be not too sure ; for one at least I can answer ; suppose I was of those few—those master few who control the spirits, that themselves control the elements—suppose that diamonds and gold were to me no more than dross, that I could by a word compel the gnome to lay at my feet such jewels as the miner never yet dug from earth, or command the nixy to fetch me a fairer pearl than ever was brought up by diver from the Indian sea—suppose, in short, that I was a brother of the Rosy Cross?"

"Ay, why not, indeed ? or the King of the Coal-mines ? or Tregagle from Cornwall ? though if you be he, I wish you joy on having got a holyday, for they tell me the old gentleman in black has commissioned you to empty Dosmary Pool with a limpet shell. How goes on the good work ? and is it true that the said shell has a hole in the bottom of it, as the people tell us ? I should think it must advance your labours mightily."

The Lord of the Fens made no reply to this mockery beyond a smile, and that more indicative of good-humoured triumph than of scorn. His action, however, was decisive enough. From his bosom he drew a small blood-red cross, shaped like those of the Maltese knights, but gleaming at one end, when held forth, with a phosphoric spark, blue and cold as the light of the glow-worm. As it felt the air the little flame shot forth with a tongue of fire, lengthening and lengthening till it reached the opposite oak, and played about its trunk and branches, though without scorching them. Upon this every bough was gently agitated, and sent forth a humming sound like the murmurs of the *Æolian* harp when the breeze has lightly touched it. As the vibration deepened, the branches put out buds, the buds unfolded into leaves, and the birds, deceived by this show of sum-

mer, flocked from all quarters, singing and chirping to nestle among the foliage.

The Rosicrucian smiled at the mute wonder of his mistress. "It is not illusion," he said; "feel the green leaves, they will abide the touch, and every year at this same season the oak shall put forth its buds in remembrance of the Rosy Cross, and the colder the season the greener shall be the foliage. And now, Emily, speak frankly; will you be mine?"

Love, doubt, and wonder mingled strangely in the maiden's bosom. To find the visions of her childhood thus on the sudden realized! to come into familiar contact with one of those beings, whose very existence she had but half believed, and then only as the faint echo of a tale from other times! the thought sent back the blood upon her heart, only to return in deeper crimson to her cheek, while every nerve in her frame tingled with new and wild sensations.

Never had the Lord of the Fens looked more handsome than now, when he stood before her with the confession of his superior nature; never had his voice sounded more sweetly on her ear; and if a doubt yet lingered in her bosom—an awe of his different being—its still low whisper was quickly drowned in the strife and clamour of other feelings that whirled through heart and brain, till it would have been hard to say which was the predominant emotion of the moment. But as the knight gently pressed her hand and murmured his passion in the deep stillness of the forest,—for the birds were on the sudden hushed as if in sympathy with the lovers, affection prevailed—and she consented to become his bride. No sooner had the faint *yes* passed her lips, than a titter was heard from a multitude, and a light clapping of many tiny hands followed, that might have been mistaken for the clash of boughs had any wind been stirring.

"Be not alarmed," said the Rosicrucian, perceiving her astonishment; "what you hear is only the rejoicing of our friends at our betrothal. Hark! again!—But I must leave you."

"Leave me?" exclaimed Emily.

"For a time only; there are laws, which even I, though master of our order, must not, and dare not break. But doubt me not; in a twelvemonth, dearest Emily, I will return to claim my bride—beneath this very oak, which then, as now, shall put forth a wintry foliage, the only green leaves of the forest. But when the buds first swell from the wood I shall not be far off; and when the leaf unfolds itself then do not fail to bide your tryste, for, if I live, on that day I will meet you here, let what will come between us. In the mean time wear this ring in token of our mutual pledge, and, as you value your own happiness and mine, never betray to mortal ear that it came from the hand of a Rosicrucian. It is as the fairy-gifts, and they, you well know, are more precious than gold to the silent tongue, but a fatal boon to those who are weak enough to talk of them."

He was interrupted by the sound of horns and the tramp of horses, that suddenly burst upon them with startling nearness. In the next moment the whole hunt swept from the glades, uncle Joseph at their head, not a little surprised at thus stumbling on their lost companions. Many a gibe was beginning to pass round at the expense of the lovers, who, it was unanimously agreed, had stolen away, when the attention of all was called off by the oak; such a sight had never been seen in the memory of man; every eye was turned towards it, and every tongue was let loose to wonder or explain, not less to the relief of Emily than the delight of the Rosicrucian, whose fantastic mood enjoyed their perplexity.

Some attempted to account for this miracle on natural grounds, calling in the tides and winds to their assistance, and leaving the question yet darker than they found it, a very common accident with philosophers of all times and countries ; others attributed it to the elves, and, in proof of their opinion, referred to a fairy circle that might be plainly seen on the grass ringing round the oak. The Lord of the Fens with a grave face suggested a third solution of the mystery. He had read in some old chronicle, when and where he could not recollect ; but he had read that the body of William Rufus was laid beneath this very oak, during a fall of rain, and hence, he concluded, arose the germination at so unusual a season, it being no more than a fitting compliment from a living tree to a dead monarch. This version chimed in exceedingly well with the belief of the old foresters, who from time immemorial had inherited the same tradition of the Red King having been laid on this spot, and had, in consequence, distinguished the tree, as their fathers did before them, by the name of the Cadnam Oak. Few, therefore, armed with such authority, were disposed to doubt the Rosicrucian's happy explanation ; nor is the belief even now less general among the villages of the New Forest. On Old Christmas-day, the usual season of the tree's germinating, the peasants never fail visiting Cadnam to witness this singular diversion from the regular laws of nature.

## CHAPTER II.

"Now dare I not scarce tread to my own hearing,  
Lest echo borrow superstition's tongue,  
And seem to answer me like one departed."

*Mysterious Mother.*

THE discussion had not yet flagged, when the swineherd appeared with the fresh horse he had borrowed for the use of Emily. The sight of this animal, whose usual vocation was carrying his dame to market with her eggs and butter, was greeted with a peal of laughter by the huntsmen; Emily at once, and without ceremony, protested that she would rather walk a bare-footed pilgrimage to Mount St. Michael than ride on such a beast, her rustic habits having given her as much horror of a bad appearance in the field as a town-bred lady would have felt at wearing an ill-fashioned frock in a drawing-room. This difficulty was met by the Lord of the Fens, who begged her acceptance of his hunter, which moreover to him was useless, as it was his intention to cross over to Southampton and embark without delay for Harfleur.

"Embark! and Harfleur!" shouted Sir Joseph, with whom he was an especial favourite; "why, what the devil ails you, man?"

The Lord o' the Fens repeated that such was his purpose, and that moreover he had no time to lose.

"Vert and venison!" exclaimed the stout old knight; "I see how it is; there is some fresh tiff between you and my little Emily. But don't be a fool, lad, and quarrel with good wine because it may

have given you a headache ; these are the ‘dulces Amaryllidis iræ,’ as my old schoolmaster used to say, and are no more to be minded than the wind that tosses the feather in your cap. I should have thought you might know as much by this time, for, to speak Heaven’s truth and an honest man’s, Emmy has given you a very sufficient taste of her frolics.”

The little damsel raised a terrible outcry at this declaration, while her lover eagerly denied the existence of all feud between himself and his mistress.

“Am glad to hear it, lad,” said the uncle ; “and why then must you leave the good old English sir-loin for frogs and fricassees ?”

“Business, Sir Joseph, of—”

“Rot business ! what has a knight and a gentleman to do with business, unless it be to sit on the bench at sessions, and whip and hang all the rogues that have the luck to come before him, especially the poachers.”

“Ay, ay, hang the poachers !” was shouted from all sides.

“Right, lads, right,” continued the veteran Nimrod, warming with his subject till he almost saw a poacher dangling in the place of every acorn ; “it’s a scandal to any government that the good old forest laws should be so shamefully relaxed. Ah, honest Will Rufus ! you were the king for my money—ill betide the fool who shot thee ;—you had a halter for every rogue ; there was **STABLESTAND**, when the knave was found in the forest with his bow bent ; **DOGDRAW**, when he was drawing with a hound after the hurt deer ; **BACKBEAR**, when he had killed, and was carrying off, his venison ; and **BLOODYHAND**, when he was seen coursing with blood upon his hands. Oh the good old times ! we have not so much as a name for these things now-a-

days, much less a halter for them ; no wonder that Jack Frenchman holds his head so high, and looks so saucily at an honest Englishman when he meets him."

While the knight was indulging in this tirade, so expressive of his own peculiar habits and the feelings of those about him, the Lord of the Fens had quietly shifted the side-saddle from the led horse and placed it on the back of his own hunter.

This preparation stopped the flood-tide of the veteran's eloquence. Resuming his wrathful aspect, he turned upon the recusant, and exclaimed, "so, lad, you won't be counselled? you are bent, I see, on leaving us."

"Much against my inclination," replied the Lord of the Fens, "as any one will easily believe who has had the fortune to pass a single day at Pear-tree Lodge. And with your good leave, and that of the Lady Emily, I propose revisiting Beaulieu the moment the business that calls me hence shall be settled."

"Shalt be heartily welcome, lad. And when may we expect you? in a week? or mayhap a fortnight?"

"Much longer."

"Vert and venison!—in a month, then?"

"I fear little short of a twelvemonth must have passed before I can again turn my horse's head towards the New Forest."

"A year!" cried the knight, in amaze; "well, as you please, lad, though I doubt you may go farther and fare worse; but that's your concern. Come, Emily; it's getting late, and we have many a mile to ride before we sit in the old ingle,—a plague upon it! I would that it was just the opposite,—that home were nearer and night farther. What a

murrain are you about, girl? why don't you get into the saddle? short leave-taking is ever the best for a long parting."

It is possible that Emily might not have been of this opinion, had she not been surrounded by so many lookers-on, none of whom were precisely of the kind to be entrusted with a lady's love-secrets. As it was, the farewell proved brief and formal enough to satisfy even the jealousy of the rivals, who, on thus unexpectedly getting rid of the dangerous favourite, could not help testifying their delight with more openness than was perhaps consistent with the established laws of courtesy.

"Confound the fellow!" said the knight, as they rode off; "I think he must have given me, as the man in the play says, a powder to make me love him. Vert and venison! I would sooner have parted with the best horse in my stable than he should bolt in this fashion,—at such a time too! just as we were getting into the heart of the season! had it been when the corn was in the ear I should not so much have minded it.

With this characteristic speech the old man dismissed the Lord of the Fens from his mind, his thoughts and attachments seldom travelling beyond the immediate sphere of his eyesight. Not so Emily; she never before knew how much she loved the Rosicrucian; this unexpected separation taught her to appreciate more truly her own feelings, and many an anxious look did she cast towards the hazy towers of Southampton, which, now the sun declined, were beginning to put on their usual mantle. A fanciful idea crossed her mind of elf-land, as the gray walls peeped through the mist, though in general the city of Sir Bevis might be supposed to belong rather to the gnomes than the fairies.

From these reveries she was unpleasantly dis-



turbed by the voice of Cornelius calling on her to look at the sunset, not from any peculiar admiration he entertained for such a thing, but because he rightly guessed the tendency of her thoughts towards the Lord of the Fens, and had no mind she should think of his rival for a single moment if he could help it. Emily, however reluctant, was forced to abandon her day-dreams, though the lover did not gain much by the change, for the splendour of the scene engrossed her every feeling to his complete exclusion. Above them was a purple mass, edged with a wide border of gold, that, while they were gazing, brightened into the vividness of flame; between this and the west glowed a mellow field of light and haze, deepening every instant till the sun sank below the cloud, stripped of all its brilliance by the mist; here it rested its broad red disk for a few moments on the horizon, and then dropped from sight like a ball of fire.

"Come on, come on," cried the old knight to the loiterers; "we have no time now for staring at the clouds like a parcel of mad poets. I promise you I am not too fond of those who are said to gambol here after sunset."

Thus urged, the whole party quickened their pace into a brisk trot, the shades of the forest growing deeper and deeper about them, and the silence becoming more intense. The trees too looked out mysteriously from the darkness, and now and then the cracking of a decayed branch, as it fell snapped by its own weight, would break in upon the stillness. Many of the riders, men that shrunk from neither fire nor steel, began to cast suspicious glances into the night of the forest, and the little that was said from time to time, subsided into tones which scarcely went beyond a whisper. All in a greater or less degree yielded to the feeling, which seems peculiar

to woodland scenery, when traversed after sunset, the uncertain outlines exciting the imagination and bringing it into seeming contact with an invisible world that, like the stars, has been obscured by day, and wakes up with night into a sort of dreamy existence.

Sir Joseph, it is true, did not consider matters so curiously, but he had the feeling in full force notwithstanding. A firm believer in fairies, ghosts, and goblins, he was careful not to say any thing that might provoke their anger or even challenge their notice in a time or place, which popular faith more peculiarly appropriated to them; accordingly when Mr. Theodore began to talk in a somewhat familiar tone of the good people the knight was up in arms on the instant, and would have made it a matter of duello had not the younger party thought proper to avoid this catastrophe by a timely recantation.

They were now entering upon the lanes about Beaulieu, but such lanes as only a forest can produce, where the oak, and the elm, and the beech are growing unmutilated amid hedges of briar and underwood. In a short time lights became visible, twinkling down in the valley below, and were welcomed with a general murmur of congratulation, in which it might almost be said that the horses joined, the weary animals pricking up their ears and many of them neighing out their satisfaction. For the first time during the last three hours Sir Joseph breathed freely; the thought that he had got safely out of the haunted domain restored at once his tongue and his temper, and placing his hand upon the shoulder of Theodore, who rode beside him, the old knight bade him speak out and spare not, "for," he added, in a gay tone, "with yon lights looking out so cheerily, I fear neither ghost nor goblin. Vert and venison! you youngsters may say what you will

of the glance from a fair lady's eye ; to my mind there's no glance half so bright as the taper that twinkles on me from my own windows after riding for hours in a dark forest. When you come to my years, perhaps you may think as I do."

"Well then," said Theodore, "since my tongue is once more free to amble, the first use I shall make of it is to consign the Good People, and the whole of their fraternity, to the keeping of a certain personage ; they have earned it at my hands, for having made dumbies of us all, when we were very well disposed to be merry."

A smart blow on the cheek was the reward of his benediction. Much wondering that so light a hand could hit so roughly, he turned round to the lady, who, as she rode at his left side, could alone, he thought, have given it, and thanked her for the fairy favour.

"What mean you by that?" asked Emily.

"Only to return my best thanks for the box on the ears with which you favoured me just now."

"How!" cried Cornelius, "did you indeed honour Mr. Rainham so far? I trust, then, you will not be so unjust as to deny me a similar token of your regard."

"Really, good folks, though I am quite willing to admit your deserts, I can't plead guilty to the indictment," said Emily.

"Then I am not obliged to you for that same token, which came twanging off so smartly?" repeated Theodore.

"I wonder that you should ask such a question, unless you have a mind to deserve that which you say you have received."

"Nay, the wonder should be all on my side, who have received a sound blow, I know not from whom—Suppose we set down the unowned favour to Friar

Rush, or Puck, or by whatever name they call him. If we may believe your Hampshire friends, he has of late been very busy in these parts."

"You may believe it," said Sir Joseph, dryly; "it's the truth."

"Humph!" ejaculated Theodore, half afraid to trust himself with the farther expression of his opinion, lest he should rouse the knight into choler. As it was, the old man's ear caught the dissatisfied note, and even that was not permitted to pass unrebuked.

"Humph!" he repeated, with angry emphasis; "that is as much as to say you fancy yourself wiser than your elders. Take my word for it, young man, when the old dog barks he gives counsel."

Theodore hastened to express his contrition for having offended, observing at the same time that, belief not being a thing dependent on the will, he ought not, in fairness, to be blamed for his incredulity.

"I don't know that," said the knight, who was in no humour to be satisfied with this partial concession; "I don't see why you should presume to think differently from your neighbours; it's an insult to the beards of older, and it may be better, men than yourself."

"I would believe if I could," exclaimed Theodore; "upon my soul, it's no fault of mine."

The piteous tone in which this was said provoked a laugh even from the angry knight; but his mirth was abruptly startled into silence by a rough voice at his elbow, exclaiming, "A pleasant night to this good company."

Sir Joseph turned short round on the speaker, and found, as well as he could distinguish in the uncertain light, a better sort of countryman at his side,

probably one of the small farmers who live in the forest, or on its outskirts.

"And who the devil may you be?" he said; "and where do you come from?"

"From Eaglehurst," replied the stranger, "whither I am returning, if my horse will carry me so far. I made bold to join your company, having a worse courage and better faith than your friend yonder. Do you pass St. Leonard's?"

The old knight looked suspiciously at the intruder, and abruptly demanded why he asked the question.

"Because I have no mind to travel that road alone if I can help it. It has got an ugly name with it of late, and they do say Friar Rush—Puck, some folks call him—is very busy there o' nights, threshing out corn with a troop of goblins to help him, frocked and cowed like so many Benedictines."

"Indeed!" said Emily, in a tone from which it would not be easy to guess whether she spoke in jest or earnest; the elves then have a singular propriety in their musqueradings, for those ruins were originally built for a barn by the Benedictine monks of Beaulieu."

"A sign the jolly old boys had good tenants," cried the knight, with unwonted vivacity; "I would that mine—a murrain on the rogues!—were half as ready with their payments."

"I should like much to see these same threshing friars," said Theodore, sarcastically; "but I fear me they appear to believers only."

"Nay," replied Emily, "an you were a preux chevalier, like those of old, you would gladly catch at so fair an occasion of proving your loyalty and devotion to your mistress. Seven nights in the ruins of St. Leonard's, with such ghostly company, would

be a decent beginning for two maiden adventurers, who have the golden spurs to win. How say you, gentlemen,—will you essay the enterprise?"

This proposition, though made in jest, was eagerly accepted by the lovers in the overflowing spirits of the moment, and seconded by Sir Joseph. Each party had his own views in the matter. Theodore, who doubted his rival's courage, had good hope that he was thus leading him into a dilemma which must somehow or another end in his disgrace; Cornelius agreed to the frolic, because he would not seem more fearful than his rival; the old knight tickled himself with the certainty, as he felt it to be, that both the candidates for chivalric honours would be drubbed by the elves into a more orthodox belief; and Emily, who never loved a joke the less for its being seasoned with a spice of mischief, had a vague notion of making a fool of both parties. As for the stranger horseman, he burst into a laugh so loud and long, peal succeeding peal like the wonderful echoes by the lake of Killarney, that those nearest to him immediately drew away with something like a doubt of his real nature.

"Vert and venison!" exclaimed Sir Joseph, wincing in the saddle, "if you are for our company, laugh like a Christian, and don't bray out in that inhuman fashion. One would almost take you for—Ahem!—there is no use in mentioning the names of certain folks."

"I understand you," said the farmer; "but all sinners are not devils, and all devils are not Beelzebubs. If it were a little lighter, you might see I carried no cloven foot in my boot, and no horns under my bonnet."

"Say no more about it—say no more about it," cried Sir Joseph, hastily.

"As you please for that," rejoined the farmer;

"but will those gentlemen really and truly be no worse than their word? I have known many a horse carry his head as high, and yet boggle most confoundedly when he was brought to the leap."

"And I," said Theodore, "have known many a Hampshire hog with better breeding than his master."

At this unlucky slip, the little damsel drew up her palfrey with a humorous affectation of wrath, and asked how much of the compliment was intended for herself.

"For you?" stammered Theodore, not a little confounded at this unlooked-for application of his words.

"Yes, for me," replied the damsel. "I was born and bred on the skirts of the forest, and it is too late, I fear, to change my Hampshire birth, even if I had the inclination."

"Oh! you are out of the question. I meant—"

"You meant that I was a hog," interrupted the farmer, roughly; "but it's as well to be a hog as an ass any day, so we may cry quits for that matter. And now will you keep to your bargain? Here are fifty gold Caroluses in this bag—I have just had them told out to me by young Dibble the publican for hay and oats—I will lay every piece of them that you two gentles don't sleep seven nights alone at St. Leonard's; and I'll beg miss, here, to be the stake-holder."

"Take him at his word, lads," cried Sir Joseph; "you can't do better than take him at his word."

"Agreed!" replied the lovers, simultaneously.

"It's a wager, then," said the horseman; "and with permission, miss, I will leave the stake in your hands. Only remember, gentles; each of you is to pass seven nights, alone, in the ruins of St. Leonard's, or it's no bargain."

"Ay, ay," cried Sir Joseph, in high glee; "we all understand the wager. But here we are at the lodge, so you may as well walk in, farmer, and take a morsel with us; we can find a corner for you at the board, I'll be sworn for it."

"Thank you, Sir Knight, thank you; but I must on to Eaglehurst. The little ones will be crying out for dad, and dame would scold like one of ninety if I were to play truant. Good night, gentles; we shall soon meet again, and perhaps when you least expect me."

The farmer put spurs to his horse, and rode off at a round pace, followed by no good wishes from Sir Joseph at this insult to his hospitality.

"There's a pretty return for my condescension! A knight of the shire invites a beggarly yeoman to good meat and stout ale, and the knave puts him off with his wife and children. A man, quotha! By the bones of stout Sir Bevis, when he laughed in that uproarious fashion I thought a water-bull was bellowing at me, but I find he is only a tame cuckold after all; he'll never remove Mort-Stone."

"A water-bull!" muttered Theodore, with a contemptuous shrug, and then jogging Emily's elbow, he whispered in tones that were meant only for her ear, "what for a beast is this, I wonder?"

"Uncle," cried the malicious damsel, "here is Mr. Theodore very anxious to learn—"

"Nay, but Miss Monkton—"

"I wish you would not interrupt a lady when she is speaking."

"What is it, girl? what is it?"

"Only Mr. Rainham wants to know what sort of an animal the water-bull is."

Sir Joseph stopped in the act of dismounting, and with one foot only in the stirrup, gravely replied, "The *Water-bull* is a goblin that haunts the Isle of



Man in the shape of a natural bull, or at least so like him that few can distinguish one from the other. A friend of mine set out to hunt a beast of this kind, with a party of his tenants, but the goblin was too cunning for them. After leading them a handsome run over all the rough ground of the island, he suddenly took to the water, where he played at bo-peep with them for hours, ducking and diving, and showing just enough of his huge head to make fools of them."

"Pray, sir," said Theodore, as if struck by the thought on the sudden, "pray, sir, tell me before you dismount, is it true that the Manksmen punish fibbers after a peculiar fashion of their own? I have heard say that they perch the culprit on a scaffold, with his tongue in a leather noose,—a *bridle* they call it—and, when this pretty curb is taken off, he is obliged to cry out three times, 'Tongue, thou hast lied! tongue, thou hast lied! tongue, thou hast lied!'"

"Every syllable of it is true," replied the old gentleman, who was not quick enough to perceive the lurking sarcasm, as there was nothing in the tones of Theodore to betray it; "every syllable of it is true for slanderers and backbiters; but I can't dangle in the stirrup all night to explain these matters. Let me see the fire blazing and the punch-bowl smoking beside me, and I'll tell you more about them."

## CHAPTER III.

—In one night, ere glimpse of morn,  
His shadowy flail hath threshed the corn  
That ten day-labourers could not end.

MILTON.

THERE is scarcely a greater difference between the ideas of youth and age than there is between the counsels of night and morning. If youth loves pleasure too well, or sometimes, going yet another step, inclines to folly, so too does night; if age have temper for the present and sorrow for the past, so also the day has its wisdom and its regrets.

When the sun again rose upon Theodore, the jest of the preceding night appeared insipid enough, and gladly would he have abandoned the wager, had he not, on visiting Emily at noon, found all parties bent on considering it a serious matter, which could hardly with credit be evaded. So hot was his rival in the business, that, though in general by no means fond of boasting of his seniority, he now put it forward as giving him a clear title to precedence in the trial. The fact is, and it has been noticed before, that, being a passionate admirer of gold, he was resolved not to lose the chance of fifty Caroluses if they were to be gained at so cheap a price as sleeping a few nights in an old barn. Much to his surprise, the question of priority was yielded without opposition by Theodore, who was well disposed to let him go first in what he now considered to be no better than a race of ridicule.

With the uprising of the moon the adventurer ac-

cordingly set out for Saint Leonard's. These ruins lie about two miles from Souley lake, or pond as it is more generally called, and, for a barn, are of enormous size, extending almost eighty paces from one gable end to the other. They are surrounded by the vestiges of different buildings, the most conspicuous of which are the walls of a small chapel in a yet more desolate state than the granary. The roof of the larger ruin, now long since fallen in, at the date of our story retained its form, but ribbed and broken like the plankless sides of some old hull that has been wrecked on an unfriendly shore. So many years as Cornelius had lived at Baddesley,—and it was at no great distance from this spot,—he had never before noticed the ruins, though it is scarcely possible he should not have seen them. But this insensibility to all near objects is common to the inhabitants of most villages, whether in our own or other countries. The Hindoo, being asked the name of some high mountain in the immediate vicinity of his dwelling, replied, by demanding in his turn, “what was the use of giving a name to that which one sees every day?”

The first thing that struck Cornelius, on drawing nigh to the haunted spot, was the glimmering of a light from the ruins. A slight tremor seized him at this unexpected appearance, which would probably have sent him home without the farther chance of peril, but then the gold!—the gold!—one retrospective glance at the fifty Caroluses, and he found, as many others might have done under similar circumstances, that nothing braces the nerves of a timid man like the red metal, especially if he happen to be a miser at the same time.

A closer inquiry showed Cornelius that the supposed tapers were neither more nor less than the moonlight shining through the fissures made by decay

in the opposite side of the building. Thus reassured, he ventured to trust himself within the doubtful precincts, where as yet, at all events, there was not the least sign of any supernatural visitants, unless, indeed, their nearness might be inferred from the well-swept floor and the absence of all cobwebs upon the walls. If, however, a suspicion of the kind crossed his mind, it was quickly forgotten as he became more familiarized with his situation.

Wrapped round in the boat-cloak he had brought for the purpose, and coiled up in a corner of the ruin, he shut his eyes with the earnestness of one who is bent on compelling himself to sleep away the hours. But it is not often that sleep chooses to obey so arbitrary a summons. The more closely he compressed his lids the more he seemed to awake; every thing that he would most willingly have forgotten taking this particular opportunity of presenting itself to his recollection. The probable value of Emily's estate; the chance of her succession to the property of an old aunt; nice calculations as to whether the spendthrift, Master Goldshred, was likely to discharge his bond in time, or whether he should have, what he infinitely preferred, an opportunity of foreclosing;—these and sundry similar speculations presented themselves with as much vividness as if they had been the especial business of the moment.

In the midst of all this turmoil between the desire of sleep and the usual occupants of his brain, he was not a little startled by the deep echoes of a curfew bell, that apparently came from the roofless chapel hard by. His eyes opened with involuntary motion at the sound, when they were greeted with that which made him draw yet more closely into his nook. A host of friars, jolly little personages, not more than three feet high, but of conventual

rotundity, swarmed upon the timbers above, some striding across the beams in hobby-horse fashion, some dangling by a single hand, and others, of a yet merrier mood, standing upon their heads and bumping at a furious rate along the rafters. To forbear watching these mad pranks was impossible even to a frightened man. His fears gradually gave way to increasing interest in the scene, when a rosy-cheeked brother, who sat on a lofty beam at the gable end of the building, and who seemed to be on the look-out, began to call upon the absent father-abbot to return to his duties. This hint was taken by the whole fraternity, their gambols ceasing on the instant, and all joining the watchman in his summons.

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#### WATCHMAN.

Friar Rush! halloo! halloo!

Jolly Rob, we wait for you.

In what corner are you hidden?

At what merry prank forbidden?

Are you now *colt-pixy* playing,

Silly foals around you neighing!

Or with tricky visions creeping

On the brain of maiden sleeping.

#### *Second Voice.*

It may be some maid he shrives;

Or gives counsel to the wives,

Teaching them the way to fool

Mates unapt to lawful rule;

Or he skims the cream-bowl, set

By the friends who love him yet.

Friar Rush! halloo! halloo!

Jolly Rob, we wait for you.

*Third Voice.*

Leave the bowl, and leave the maid,  
 Curfew tolls the hour of shade ;  
 Here is work that must be done,  
 Ere the rising of the sun ;  
 Barley, wheat, and oats a store—  
 We must thresh them on the floor.  
 Friar Rush ! halloo ! halloo !  
 Jolly Rob, we wait for you.

Thus invoked on all sides, the abbot suddenly bounced in upon them, like a coal leaping from the fire among a party of Christmas gossips, and a pretty abbot he was !—except that he carried a flail for a crosier, his appearance would have reminded any one of the boy-bishop of the old game, for, though his body was round as an ale-barrel, his face had all the rosy freshness of childhood before the down is on the cheek. The holy friar handled his weapon with singular dignity, and chanted forth a reply with as much unction as if he had been celebrating high mass in the Cathedral-church at Winchester, to the great edification, as it seemed, of his tiny auditors.

## FRIAR RUSH.

Here am I with ready flail ;  
 When did Friar Rush e'er fail ?  
 Bring Sir John, the bearded knight,  
 Black and blue I'll thresh the wight ;  
 Bring Don Wheatear,—he shall quake,  
 Every bone within him ache ;  
 Bring me surly yeoman, Oat,  
 I will trim his yellow coat.  
 In the coigne no idler lurk,  
 They who eat must stoutly work—  
 Till the morning cock shall crow,  
 And we're off with ho ! ho ! ho !

And the whole party joined in chorus—

Ho ! ho ! ho !  
Mock and mow,  
Till the early cock shall crow.

While the walls were yet ringing with their jovial voices, down slipped the friars, much after the fashion of a flock of sparrows dropping from the tree on which they have been keeping watch into the barn-yard below. No sooner had the abbot of this elfin monastery alighted on his feet, than he began to sniff and give other tokens of his nose having received some mortal offence.

“Ugh ! ugh ! all is not right here. Ugh ! ugh ! methinks you have not swept the floor clean to-night.”

And again he sniffed, while Cornelius sat trembling in the corner with sad misgivings lest the flails might be employed upon his back instead of upon the wheat-sheaves, which came tumbling in as if they had been rained down from the moon and stars.

“Ugh ! ugh !” continued the abbot, wrinkling his brows and pursing up his lips ; “some uncleanly thing has got among us. Bring in my holy water-pot, that I may exorcise it.”

At this mandate there waddled forward a jolly friar, who, if friars had been fattened for the same purpose as turkeys, would have been in high request at Christmas. In his chubby little hands he bore a vessel, that, from its size and shape had probably been an old-fashioned punch-bowl. It was almost large enough to have made a bath for the abbot himself, and reamed with a boiling-hot liquid, the fragrance of which curled in vapours about the barn.

“It must be sweet-wort,” said Cornelius to himself ; “and, now I remember, that old bore, Sir Joseph, said the Manks fairies use to christen their children in sweet-wort when no water is at hand. I marvel what the imps will do next.”

Upon this point he was not long to be left in doubt. The friars bustled into rank, two and two, and paced round the barn, headed by the abbot, with his aspergoire, from which he scattered the hot liquid to the right and left, twanging forth a form of prayer, that certainly was not to be found in the mass-book.

Be you lizard, toad, or bat,  
Nibbling mouse, or bloody rat,  
Dog that bites, or snake that stings,  
Worm that crawls, or cat that springs,  
Owl, that muses in his nook  
Where the moon-beams never look—

Hence ! avaunt !

Nor dare to haunt

Where Friar Rush and his cowed crew  
The barley malt, and the brown ale brew,  
And are wielding the flail the long night through.

During this novel formula, Cornelius had waited with no very pleasant anticipations for the moment when their march would bring them to his hiding-place. It came at last with the concluding line of the exorcism, and the abbot, having sufficiently bestowed his favours on the tenants, if any such there were, of the other corners, dashed bowl and all in the face of the intruder. No sooner had he received this warm salute than he started up, half blinded, and uttered a loud cry, that betrayed him at once to the pseudo brotherhood.

“Oho ! the lapis offensiois !—the stumbling block !”—exclaimed the abbot.

“You little villain !” cried Cornelius, forgetting his terrors in the incontrollable spirit of indignation ; “I have a great mind to wring the neck off your shoulders for your impudence.”

“Ho ! ho !” shouted the abbot.

“Ho ! ho !” responded his companions.

“Sinner as thou art,” said the abbot, “dost thou



rebel against the cowl and the crosier? Must I call in the help of the secular arm to tame thee? Hey, Tearem! Holdfast! Mouser! Killbuck! hey! hey!"

At this summons in bounced a dozen huge dogs of the wolf-breed, each big enough and fierce enough to pull down a stag of himself; in a twinkling these canine administrators of the clerical law pulled Master Cornelius to the ground, where they held him fast, some griping his clothes in their teeth, and the two largest fixing their paws upon his chest on either side, like the lion and the unicorn supporting the arms of England. So rapid had been the whole transaction that the victim was in their hold before he had time to think of any defence, even supposing it to have been practicable.

"What think you now?" cried the abbot; "have you lost your fancy for twisting people's necks, and are you disposed to be a dutiful son to Mother Church, or must I let loose the secular arm upon your stubbornness?"

This question was yet farther enforced by a deep impatient growl from the four-footed seculars, who, it was quite evident, would have liked nothing better than to try conclusions with the recusant. Such a demonstration left him little inclined to resist or protract the matter. In the humblest tones that might be, he signified his entire submission to the will of his castigators, earnestly begging to be released from the dogs.

"Well responded, mi fili," said the abbot, in answer to his protests; "lætatur cor meum,—my heart rejoiceth at thy obedience, and thy penance shall be light accordingly. Thou shalt only help thresh till cock-crow."

The hounds were called off, apparently much to their dissatisfaction, and, a flail being put into his hand, Cornelius, wofully enough, commenced his

novel occupation under the close superintendence of Tearem and Holdfast, who spontaneously took upon themselves the task of watching him. Friar Rush, either thinking it beneath his dignity to work himself, or else considering that he had provided a sufficient substitute for his own labours in the person of his penitent, mounted a heap of wheatsheaves, and began playing the Elf-king's dance upon a small stringed instrument, as singular for its construction as for its sweetness. The tones it poured forth were of such wonderful melody, they might have charmed the bird from the tree, or the adder from his hole.

It soon, however, appeared that there was something more than mere pleasure intended by this music, and he had to experience in his own person the truth of the popular belief in regard to the Elf-king's dance; as the dwarf-abbot played, slow or fast, so did Cornelius find himself compelled to work, his flail moving precisely in the same time with the fingers of the musician. Now and then the friar would relax into an *andante* or *adagio*, as if to tantalize his substitute with a glimpse of the rest he was not to enjoy; but before the weary thresher could wipe his brow, or in any way benefit by the change, he would start off again into a *prestissimo*, embellished with sundry shakes and graces, that were sure to provoke a corresponding flourish from the sympathetic flail. It was in vain that Cornelius, whose arms were ready to drop from his shoulder, endeavoured to get rid of the tenacious implement; his fingers only closed the more tightly upon it, and the attempt was sure to call forth a *furioso* movement from the abbot.

Under such diligent labourers, the whole of the corn was threshed out long before the stars began to fade. "Now," thought Cornelius to himself, "I

shall surely be allowed to rest, and heaven knows I need it:"—but he was mistaken; the musician only changed his tune, and the friars, joining hands in a circle, dragged him round with them, while the whole party merrily sang a sort of roundel, not very unlike the choral chant of the Hampshire peasants, except that they substituted a barley-mow for a gooseberry bush. Thus it ran—

This is the way we shave the monk, shave the monk,  
This is the way we shave the monk,  
Round about the barley-mow,  
Underneath the holly bough,  
Night till morn.

Then there was a pause, when the first friar grasped his neighbour tightly by the nose, and imitated the action of shaving. The compliment was forwarded from the one to the other till it had travelled the circle through, amid wry faces and snapping of fingers, and then the song and the dance were resumed.

This is the way we wash the monk, wash the monk,  
This is the way we wash the monk,  
Round about the barley-mow,  
Underneath the holly bough,  
Night till morn.

As before, the friars suited the action to the word, and each one scrubbed the face of the one next to him with a handful of barley straw till his cheek burnt again. After this novel purification the song and the dance went on again.

This is the way we load the monk, load the monk,  
This is the way we load the monk,  
Round about the barley-mow,  
Underneath the holly bough,  
Night till morn.

In a trice, each monk had converted his frock into a bag, which he filled with the threshed corn and placed on his neighbour's shoulder, who seemed as light under it as if he only carried a lady's reticule. Cornelius too imitated this, as he had the other parts of the game, to the best of his power, and in his turn found himself loaded with a small sack, that from its weight must have held something more solid than wheat or barley. Before, however, he could gratify his curiosity by a hurried peep at the contents, they had joined hands and were off again.

This is the way we speed the monk, speed the monk,  
This is the way we speed the monk,  
Round about the barley-mow,  
Underneath the holly bough,  
Night till morn.

And the first monk, by way of comment on the word speed, lent his nearest companion a kick on a nameless part, that speeded him through the broken roof; he, in his turn, was accommodated with a similar favour by the one next to him, and so on, till they all had disappeared, like so many sparks flying up a chimney. Cornelius had not failed to do as he saw others did, and, being the last of the circle, now found himself alone with Friar Rush. What was next to be done?

The abbot looked at Cornelius—Cornelius looked at the abbot.

The abbot bowed—Cornelius did the same.

“Good-night!” said the abbot—

“Good-night!” re-echoed Cornelius.

“You first,” said the abbot.

Cornelius looked about, but, though the moon shone bright, he could no longer see the door by which he had entered. The friar read his thoughts as easily as though they had been printed on his brow, and every letter in magnificent pica.

"No occasion for a door, when there are so many outlets in the roof—jump."

"Jump!—the roof!" said Cornelius; "you forget, my little fellow; I am mere mortal man, and have neither the wings of a bird, nor the feet of a—a—"

"Speak out," said the friar, grinning.

"Nor the feet of one of your family."

"And what do you know of my family?" asked the friar.

"Little—but little—" said Cornelius, and then added to himself, "I would to heaven it were still less."

"Little or much, you must jump if you mean to sleep in whole bones again."

"Impossible!"

"Hey, Tearem!—Holdfast!—Mouser!—Hey! hey!"

"Stop! stop, my good friend," cried Cornelius, alarmed at the idea of again coming under the clutches of his four-footed antagonists; "I will do any thing and every thing you will have me."

"Leap, then," said the friar.

"And what am I to do with this bag?" said Cornelius, piteously.

"E'en what you please; it is your own; I give it in requital of your night's work with the flail. But I advise you to make haste, for my seculars are growing impatient."

A deep growl confirmed this assertion.

Thus admonished, Cornelius no longer hesitated to take the improbable leap, and to his great surprise, clearing the wall, he fell, not upon the hard ground, but upon his own bed at Baddesley.

Stunning as this miracle was, there was no doubting it when the fact was so strongly attested by the evidence of all his senses combined. There

was the well-known tapestry, the perfumed night-lamp burning as usual on the table, and even the ticking of the clock upon the mantel-piece had something in it too familiar to be mistaken.

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## CHAPTER IV.

We wring ourselves into this wretched world  
To pule, and weep, exclaim, to curse, and rail,  
To fret, and ban the fates.

MARSTON.

For some time his brain toiled, and not to much purpose, among the events of the night, which was now rapidly passing into a misty daybreak. Had he dreamed? or was he now dreaming?—no, neither the one nor the other; he was too strongly conscious for present sleep, and dreams never left behind them such vivid recollections. Besides, there was the bag lying on the floor. No sooner did his eye catch this object, than full of hopes and doubts he sprang from his bed to examine whether it really contained the promised gold, for fairies had been known, as he recollected, to bestow gifts which would not afterward abide examination. With a hasty hand he ripped open the canvass, when a shower of Caroluses dropped out of it, making, as they fell, a music more agreeable to his ear than the strains of St. Cecilia herself would have done. A rapid tale assured him that there were a hundred and fifty pounds, all of pure, new-coined metal, his own undoubtedly, for had he not the friar's especial word to vouch for the gift—or rather for the hire, the reward of a night's hard labour? Labour! the phrase, as he half

thought it, half muttered it, gave birth to another fancy—might not the abbot, the excellent abbot, be disposed to pay at the same rate for a second night of industry? Threshing out corn was not, to be sure, an occupation very consonant with his usual habits, but then this was not like the common labour of the flail; it was an adventure, almost worthy to be mentioned with the deeds of Sir Bevis himself, whose effigy he had so often admired on the Bar at Southampton, frowning defiance at his rival Ascaparte, on the opposite side of the building.

To sleep, with such thoughts working in his brain, was impossible. He looked out upon the rising sun, and for once found the daybreak glorious, his fancy labouring with some dim comparisons of the orb to his darling gold, though much to the advantage of the metal. Still it was an amusement calculated to occupy a mind like his for a long time together, and the time to nightfall soon grew as tedious to him as if it had been the summer solstice, instead of being only a week or two removed from the shortest day of the year. But, longest or briefest, day must have an end, and after hours, that seemed like ages, the moment at last came for visiting the barn, bringing with it certain misgivings that had not troubled him in the morning: it was a well-known fact that the fairies hated avarice no less than sluttishness, and that these friars were of the elfin brood there could be little doubt; how then if they resented his second intrusion, and, instead of rewarding him for his industry, inflicted punishment on his greediness? they were like enough to play such a prank, or popular opinion belied them sadly. For a moment his heart failed him, and he was on the point of returning, but when on approaching the ruins, he heard the merry laugh of the elfin friars within, he drew fresh courage from the sound, feeling assured that



creatures of so mirthful a disposition could not mean ill to any one, unless provoked to it by indiscretion. Nor did the result in any way disparage his judgment. On his stealing into the barn with a wary glance and a timid step, he was greeted as on the preceding night by Friar Rush and his goblin rout, who demanded his assistance with the same ceremonies and rewarded it with the same profuseness, the only difference being that he escaped the preliminary ablution with the sweet-wort.

Six nights had thus passed, and on the morning of the seventh day he determined to visit his friends at Beaulieu, for so fully had the gold occupied his waking thoughts, that till then he had almost forgotten his mistress. At the same time he had not the slightest intention of communicating to any one the secret of his good fortune ; no, the golden harvest was his own, and he had no mind that strangers should put their sickle to it, under which name of strangers, where money was concerned, he invariably included all mankind, even to the brother that had slept under the same heart.

On reaching Pear-tree Lodge, he found the house in a strange state of commotion, from the kitchen to the garret. Sir Joseph was in his magisterial chair, holding an inquisition of some kind among his servants both male and female, and Cornelius, seeing him thus occupied, was about to retire, when the knight caught a glimpse of him and suddenly broke off with, "Come in, lad ; come in. Bones of Rufus ! here's a pretty business ! I have been robbed, and can find neither the thief nor the money ; robbed of six bags, each holding a hundred and fifty gold Caroluses. Oh, if I could once get the rascal under my thumb ! I'd squeeze the gold or the best blood in his body out of him."

"Six bags ! gold Caroluses !" exclaimed Corne-



lius, whose imagination instantly reverted to the bags of Friar Rush, with some doubts of their having been honestly come by.

"Ay, you may well look astounded," replied the knight; "it has astounded, and confounded me too, for that matter. Vert and venison! I should have as soon expected a mermaid in Souley Pond as a thief among my orderly household; and yet a thief there must be, or the gold would not be missing."

"It's very strange!" said Cornelius, the exclamation applying rather to his own thoughts than to the remarks of the old knight.

"Strange!" retorted Sir Joseph; "it's monstrous! it's abominable! Why, man, there is not one among this tribe of blue-bottles,"—alluding to the colour of the livery generally worn by servants at that period,—"there is not one among these knaves who has not been born and bred on the estate, either in my time or my father's; and they to rob me! But there is good hope that the rogue, whoever he is, may yet meet with a short shrift and a tall gallows, for I set a mark long ago upon every coin in my hoard."

Here was a pleasant piece of information! From what had just been said, there was every reason to believe that Friar Rush had paid him in stolen gold; and, what was worse, marked gold, or his conscience might perhaps have digested without much difficulty the little awkwardness of their not having been too honestly obtained. What was he to do? return them? that would be particularly inconvenient, besides exposing him to the chance of some ugly suspicions. Willing as people were in general to believe elf-tales, it was much to be doubted whether such a story as his would find credit enough with the world to exculpate him from the charge of theft, backed as it would be by his passion for wealth, which he

could not help owing to himself was somewhat too notorious. To keep the gold, then, was not only the most agreeable, but the most prudent course ; and, thus determined, he took a hasty leave of Sir Joseph, under the plea of not interrupting his judicial investigations, and returned to Baddesley.

Long and anxious were his meditations on the place to which he should confide his treasure ; for, with a superfluity of caution that often accompanies men when employed upon projects of a doubtful character, he had persuaded himself that, if he trusted it either to chest or drawer, some accident would betray him. The result was to bury the gold under an elm-tree that grew at the bottom of the garden.

The night, which had now set in, was not altogether unfavourable to his purpose, for though it was the time of the full moon, yet the clouds, rolling along in heavy masses, would at intervals obscure her brightness, and quite long enough for the business he had in hand. It was not, however, accomplished without sundry alarms. The fall of the dry leaves would make him pause ; the wail of the churlish wind among the heather was enough to startle him ; and the sudden apparition of a head above the quick-set actually sent all the blood in his body back again upon his heart. He looked, and fancied it was the pale face of Friar Rush ; and yet—no—while he gazed, the features moulded themselves into the likeness of the strange horseman he had met in the forest ; and, again, it was neither monk nor horseman ; it was the Lord of the Fens. The longer he looked, the more his eyesight dazzled ; the object was like some live coal that glimmers into all manner of shapes, now being a tower, now a tree, now a dog, now a bear, and at times with that imperfect, wavering likeness to all these forms that the eye cannot distinguish to which it in truth belongs.

But the fear of discovery was strong enough to balance the fear of the supernatural, and he walked up to the hedge, though with tottering knees, when, lo and behold ! it turned out to be the head of a white horse that was peering over the quickset, attracted, in all probability, by the light of his lantern. Indignant beyond measure at such a solution of his terrors, Cornelius hit the poor animal a sound blow over the nose with his spade, which sent him full gallop to the other horses that were grazing on the common, and spread consternation among the whole party. There was a general neighing, and flourishing of tails, and kicking up of heels, as if the gad-fly had been let loose among them.

But when the task was completed, Cornelius felt no particular satisfaction at being thus divided from his gold. Many a father had buried his son with less regret than he now felt, when the last spade-full of earth closed up what he considered to be the grave of his treasure ; and if he did not weep, his sorrow was only the more sincere.

Just as he had finished, the village clock struck nine—high time to visit St. Leonard's, if ever he intended it ; and to this his desires pointed warmly enough, but, after the recent discovery, he was afraid to trust the friar. It was more than probable that the elves, who had evinced so mischievous a disposition, might not content themselves with this prank, but had some other ungracious tricks in store, which they would be sure to play off if he only allowed them the opportunity. That he might not, therefore, be tempted by his love of gold into supplying them with this occasion, he betook himself to bed, there to meditate on the past, and its probable effects upon the future.

About a third part of the night had passed, when, between sleeping and waking, he was startled by a

deep moaning sound, that at once shook off his growing inclination to slumber. At first he took it for the bellowing of the stags in the forest, and noticed it only by a fretful exclamation; but it continued too long and too piercing for the cry of animals, till at last it compelled his attention. He sat up in bed, and, after listening anxiously for several minutes, became convinced that the shrieks, or groans, or whatever else they were, proceeded from his own garden. Under the impulse of a stronger feeling than curiosity, he sprang upon the floor, and, throwing open the window, looked out with feverish expectation; but, though the moon shone brightly far and wide, he could discern nothing. Still the sounds were too audible to be mistaken for a mere creation of the fancy; and, as well as might be judged, they came in the direction of the elm under which he had so recently deposited his treasure.

Hastily dressing himself, he was about to descend and examine into the mystery, when a loud knocking at the door made him draw back again.

He was precisely in that excited state when the fall of a leaf is sound enough to shake the mind from its balance, and scarcely could he muster up sufficient voice to inquire, "Who is there?"—no answer was returned.

"Who is there?" he repeated, in a yet fainter tone, at which the knocking was renewed with increased violence, and again a dead pause followed.

He listened with a beating heart. At length his ear caught the murmuring of voices that he thought were somewhat familiar to him, and again he demanded, "Who is it that knocks at this late hour?"

"It is I, sir—and I—and I," replied the united voices of several domestics.

"And what in the name of the dev—, I mean what in the name of heaven brings you all to my

bedroom at a time like this? Is the house on fire, or have thieves broken in? or what else is the matter?"

"Worse, sir, ten times worse," responded all the voices in unison; "there's a mandrake groaning in the garden; or else the corpse of some murdered man has been buried beneath the old elm, and now his spirit can't rest quiet till the body is dug up again and laid comfortably among Christians in the church-yard."

A new terror flashed like lightning across the mind of Cornelius—what if this groaning should draw others to the place of this hidden treasure? nothing was more probable, and in that case discovery would be certain. There remained but one way of avoiding this peril, which was to dig up the gold, when he could do so unperceived, and fling it into the river—or even into the sea, if he could so manage it. To get rid of the domestics was the first requisite preliminary, and to stifle, if possible, their anxious curiosity before the spark burst into a flame that must inevitably be fatal to him.

"Out upon ye!" he exclaimed; "have you lived in the forest to these years, and know not the bellowing of a stag from the cry of a human voice when you hear it? To bed with you, knaves, and don't venture to wake me again with your ghosts and goblins, or I may strip your livery and send you out to seek for a new service."

The rebuked serving-men slunk off at this reply, without daring to moot the point any farther; and when, from the general quiet in the house, he concluded there was no fear of his being watched or overlooked, he stepped forth into the garden, armed with spade and mattock and as much resolution as he could summon for the nonce. The wailings were now so distinct that there could be no doubt

of their direction ; they proceeded, it was evident, from the root of the elm, and hence he saw with increasing alarm the necessity of immediately removing the gold before the strange cries had attracted the whole neighbourhood. With a speed proportionate to his fears, he plunged the spade into the earth ; a groan, deeper and more hollow than any he had yet heard, made him recoil and leave the spade sticking in the ground, while the hair bristled upon his head, and every limb was rigid with terror.

“ Dig away, man, dig away,” cried a voice close by ; “ I’d give a pint myself to know what it is that keeps up such a moaning and groaning under the old elm.”

Cornelius looked round with a change, rather than a diminution, of his terrors, and upon a stile, a few paces from the boundary hedge of the garden, saw the farmer—and this time it really was he—there could be no illusion in the matter ; the moon shone full upon his face, one moment gilding it into the complexion of a brass knocker, and the next moment spreading so livid a hue over it that one would almost have supposed the life had left it. The owner of this ghastly head nodded it familiarly at Cornelius, and reminded him of their wager.

“ I told you we should meet again when you least expected it, and so it has turned out. The truth is, I had been looking after a bit of venison in the forest—but mum for that—and, taking a short cut across the fields in my way home, the groans from your garden made me stop to see what was the matter.”

In his heart Cornelius wished him at the bottom of the Solent ; he hardly knew what to say, and muttered something about the probability of a spring beneath the elm.

"A spring, say you? I should not at all wonder. But dig away, that we may see for ourselves without guessing, for I am almost tired of perching up here."

"Then why don't you get down," said Cornelius, gruffly, "and go about your business? At this hour bed is the fittest place for every honest man."

"That's as much as to say you want to get rid of me. Sorry for it, neighbour. Here have I been sitting and wondering for the last two hours, and here I shall sit and wonder till day comes and goes again, if I do not sooner find the meaning of these noises."

Gladly would Cornelius have repaid this declaration with a branch from the elm, had there been the slightest chance of doing so with safety; but the farmer was the stouter man of the two, and had resolution characterized on his open forehead; nor would either threats or cajoleries induce him to stir from his post; at the one he laughed, at the other he whistled, seeming to find a fresh piquancy added to the gratification of his will in the annoyance it gave to Cornelius. With the familiarity of an equal he again bade him put his hands to the spade and see what was below, while Cornelius, divided between wrath at his tormentor, alarm at the idea of supernatural agency, and dread of the possible consequences if the morning should find him a watcher and his task still unaccomplished, had almost wrought himself up to a pitch of phrensy.

"What a murrain ails thee, man?" said he of the stile; "why don't you go on with your work?"

"Death and hell!" cried Cornelius, unable to bear it any longer, and hurling the spade from him, "I'll not stir a spit of earth while you sit croaking there."

"And I shan't budge a foot till I know what's  
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hid below that tree ; many's the worse night than this I have roughed it, when the snow was on the ground, and every dew-drop turned to an icicle as it fell ; and now by Saint Paul, and Saint Peter to boot, I almost think the cool air is pleasanter than sweltering between a pair of blankets."

Perilous as his situation was, Cornelius quickly saw that to have recourse to violence would only increase his difficulties, for the farmer clearly had a right, if he so chose, to sit on the stile for a week together, and in his apparent strength of body, he had the full means to make that right availing. To tire out his patience seemed to be the only hope ; but unluckily his temper was not of the yielding sort ; the stars grew pale, and the morning twilight began to break without his showing the least signs of moving from the stile. There he sat dangling his legs, and whistling as if he had got a charm against sleep, or even weariness.

A night thus passed was ten times worse than threshing corn for elfin friars at Saint Leonard's ; and the morn, instead of repose, brought with it the very reality of danger he had passed the hours in apprehending. When daybreak had called up the peasantry to their usual labours, a crowd soon collected, as it would have done for a much less cause, with that childish spirit of curiosity so peculiar to Englishmen, which at any time will gather a multitude, no matter what may be the object. On the present occasion, there seemed to be some excuse for the numbers, who, in the course of a very short time, had flocked from all the surrounding parts to see the Groaning Elm of Baddesley, for so the tree already began to be called, and the name has continued with the New Foresters up to the present hour.

Among the crowd thus assembled, there was



many a one whose curiosity was so much greater even than his terrors, that he would gladly have pryed deeper into the mystery by the help of the spade, had he not been restrained by the presence of Cornelius. So sensibly alive to this was the latter, that he would not venture to leave the spot, preferring rather to hear the various remarks that flitted around, as many, and perhaps not much less antiquated than the dry leaves that were falling about them at each passing gust, though every now and then a guess would come so near the truth that he trembled for his secret. Worse than all this was the little chance that there seemed to be of the crowd ever dispersing, for as one went another came; and even now that it was high noon, instead of the number diminishing, they were visibly on the increase. One thing only was wanting to complete his discomfiture, and that was not long absent—the tale had in its progress reached Pear-tree Lodge, and forth issued Sir Joseph, upon the first note of it, all bustle and curiosity, and fully convinced that the days of faërie, if they had ever passed, had now come back again to the New Forest.

At his appearance the crowd immediately gave way, opening a ready passage for the great man of the shire, while hats were doffed, and courtesies dropped on every side, and for the moment no voice was heard except his own, as he scattered his passing salutations.

“Why, how is this?” he said, on reaching the tree; “what tale is this I hear of mandrakes and groaning elms, and—”

A deep wail—for this strange moaning was heard only at intervals—burst forth and cut short his list of prodigies. In silent wonder he looked from Cornelius to the elm, and from the elm back again to Cornelius, in as much surprise as if he had not

heard a word of the matter previously, and that too with improvements, the tale having lost nothing of the marvellous in the hands of its numerous reciters. The farmer, who had maintained his post all this time with wonderful pertinacity, hastened to claim acquaintance with the old knight.

"A queer business this, Sir Joseph! the groaning elm of Baddesley will be a talk for our gossips and a tale for their grandchildren—ay, and for those after them, when they are in the churchyard."

"What! my farmer of the forest!" exclaimed Sir Joseph, who had not before observed him. "Bones of Rufus! in a few days we shall have all the country about us to hear this singing-bird, an' his song hold out so long."

"Yes," replied the farmer, with great indifference to the knight's rank and office, "we may all sing to the old tune of 'mo' fools yet.'"

But the knight was too full of the groaning elm to notice other matters. He began to question and cross-question Cornelius with as much sagacity as in later times was employed on the affair of the Cock-lane ghost, when the farmer again put in his oar.

"We may talk till Doomsday and be none the wiser; the only way to get to the root of the mystery is to dig to the root of the tree: if there be a goblin below, who is keeping up all this racket, I'll be bound to unkennel him by the help of spade and pick-axe, as surely as if I were a monk of Beaulieu with my bell, book, and candle; or if it be that the elm itself is bewitched, the sooner it is cut up and made a bonfire of the better."

This proposal was received with the universal approbation of all the by-standers, and confirmed by Sir Joseph. In vain Cornelius protested against so gross an infringement of his property, and insisted

upon being lord of his own grounds ; the mob, impelled by their impatience to dive into this mystery, and yet farther encouraged by the authority of Sir Joseph to whom they were on all occasions accustomed to defer, broke in tumultuously, some seizing the spade and pick-axe already on the ground, and others producing the tools they carried with them to their daily occupations.

At the first touch of the spade there was a loud hissing sound that made them pause again.

"It is the hissing of snakes," said one.

"It is the gushing of water," said a second.

"Dig on, fools," exclaimed Sir Joseph ; and at this mandate the work recommenced, in spite of the entreaties of Cornelius. The knight could not comprehend all this reluctance to what seemed to every one else so desirable, or help expressing a surprise that had some grains of distrust mixed up with it.

"The ground is my own," said Cornelius, in answer to his objurgations, and, struggling to get free from those who held him back—"surely I may do what I please with my own."

"Oh, ay, your own !—and so too is your throat your own, but neither law nor gospel will allow you to stick yourself like a Christmas porker."

Cornelius protested in no measured terms against the inference attempted to be drawn from these simple data, and threatened law and vengeance against all concerned. Still the work went on, though not without occasional interruptions of a kind much more likely to carry weight with them than any thing he could say. One moment the hissing would be so loud that the labourers were fain to start back with uplifted tools to scotch the snakes that they expected would spring upon them ; the next there would be such piteous groans, one

might have fancied every blow was laying open some living body instead of baring the breast of mother earth; and when, in defiance of these signs and tokens, they had taken heart of grace and dug yet deeper, a smothered laugh from below seemed to announce the presence of some goblin, whose frolicsome nature enjoyed this game of hide and seek with his mortal companions. All were in anxious expectation of the moment when the concealed cause of these vagaries should come to light, and, as often happens, every feeling of fear was for the time swallowed up in the absorbing intenseness of their curiosity.

Their wish seemed to be on the point of being gratified; the pick-axe struck upon something hard, and a general cry from the by-standers welcomed this sure sign of the crisis being at hand; but a repetition of the blow was instantly succeeded by so loud a roaring, as of pent-up flames, that the workmen, one and all, with the exception of a single sturdy fellow, scrambled out of the hole as fast as might be. Even those around shared in the alarm, and stood ready for flight should the lurking danger show itself, though every neck was eagerly stretched out towards the elm. Sir Joseph, who feared no peril so long as he had daylight to look upon it and distinguish its features clearly, waxed impatient to a degree, and cursing them all for a pack of cowards, ordered the man below to dig on. Thus urged, the peasant made such use of his spade, amid what seemed the groans of pain, the gush of waters, and the hissing of snakes, that he soon uncovered the box in which Cornelius had deposited the gold; and at the same moment down fell the uprooted elm, scattering the most forward to the right and left, though fortunately a few light bruises from the boughs were the worst mischief it occasioned. At

this catastrophe every tongue was loosed after the first moment of fright, the opinions being as various as the speakers ;—it was fairy treasure, and ought not to be touched—it was a fairy gift, and might be taken with safety, the invisible guardian having himself called their attention to it by his moaning—it belonged to the finders—it belonged to the lord of the manor—it would be better given to the church, opined the parson, such a treasure being full of peril in lay hands. But these surmises were all at once cut short by Sir Joseph, who, while others amused themselves with talking, dragged up the box with a strong arm, and with a single blow of the pick-axe dashed it to pieces. Out rolled the money-bags, and were instantly recognised by him for those he had so lately missed.

“Vert and venison ! there are the six bags of gold I have been robbed of ! Aha ! I never knew the devil was a thief before. But these are mine—mine, by the Red King ; I could swear to their bonny faces among a thousand.”

“But who placed them beneath the elm ?” said the farmer, with a peculiar glance at Cornelius. “If the black gentleman have taken to petty larceny, at least he is not such a fool as to betray his own secret.”

The suspicion implied in the words and looks of the questioner, at once gave an object and direction to the doubts that were floating around, and fixed them on Cornelius ; nor did his confusion, though natural enough to any one so circumstanced, tend at all to remove the feeling. He hesitated, and stammered,—“he had not placed them there—he hoped—he was sure his good friend Sir Joseph would acquit him of any such baseness ;—how they came there he could not pretend to say.”

"Will you take your oath of that?" said the farmer, pointedly.

This question completed the confusion of Cornelius. In an instant the idea flashed across his mind that the meddling, inquisitive stranger must have seen him bury the gold, or he would not have presumed so far; and, as a last resource, he endeavoured to cloak his own feelings and confound suspicion by bursting out into a torrent of rage, partly real and partly affected. This, however, made not the least impression on the farmer, who replied with less warmth and more severity, and their dispute must have found a climax in blows, had not Sir Joseph interfered. Delighted beyond measure with having recovered his lost gold, and pitying the condition of Cornelius, though somewhat doubtful of his integrity, he put his absolute veto on any further inquiries.

"Enough said, enough said, lads; I have my gold again, and want to hear no more prate about it. Come, Hal," he added, turning to a peasant, whom he knew for an occasional labourer in his fields, "come, Hal, take up that box on your broad shoulders—they are stout enough for as great a weight—and follow me to the Lodge, where the butler will draw you a jug of his last October brewing for your pains."

Off trudged the knight, followed by the peasant with his box, and in a short time the multitude had dispersed in knots of threes and fours, discussing the passages of the day, and not in so low a tone but that many of their remarks reached Cornelius. He stood the fixed image of despair, or rather like the quentin, which recoils from the shafts that strike it without being sensible of the blow. As, however, the first stunning sensation by degrees passed away, he became more acutely alive to his situation,

for though by far too fond of gold, he had not yet sunk the cavalier in the miser.

"I must fly this country," he said; "Hampshire is no home for me after a day like this. The very children will point the finger when I show myself; and my name will become a byword with the gossips of every village in the forest."

"Ay, that it will," said a voice; "the story will be told by every mouth that has a tongue in it, between the Avon and Southampton Bay. There will be no standing such a tale, unless you have a face of brass and a heart of marble."

Cornelius looked up; there was the eternal farmer, dangling his feet as usual upon the stile.

"Thou here!" he exclaimed, his pale cheek flushing, and his despair yielding to wrath and fury—"thou, who hast heaped all this misery upon my head! Villain! fiend—worse than the blackest of those whose abode is in the deepest hell—it is well for both of us that I have neither gun nor pistol at hand, or, by the Heaven above, this moment should be your last!"

"You have more regard for your neck than that," replied the farmer, not a whit moved by this threat; "they have strong cells and a high gallows at Winchester; and I suspect you have no mind to a lodging in the one, or a leap from the other."

Cornelius was too powerfully agitated to give vent to his feelings in words. He threw upon his tormentor one long look of despair and deadly hatred, and hurrying away to the stables, where he mounted his fleetest horse, by nightfall he had left the New Forest many miles behind him.

## CHAPTER V.

And when we stick in mire and clay,  
He doth with laughter leave us.

DRAYTON.

THE flight of Cornelius, and the causes that led to it, formed an era in the quiet life of our friends at Beaulieu. High were the debates upon it the next morning between Sir Joseph and Theodore, the knight maintaining that the gold had been abstracted by the elves, and his more youthful companion denying their existence altogether. Each party, as is usual in all differences of opinion, admired the dulness and obstinacy of his opponent, and each, as the argument advanced, felt that he had a good and lawful cause to be indignant.

"How can you," said Theodore, "put any faith in such antiquated trumpery? In the time of James, indeed, that old witch-hunting driveller, the people might be fairly allowed to be no wiser than their monarch, but credit me no goblins haunt the green-sward now-a-days; they have gone, and many a better thing has gone with them."

"God's light! man," replied the knight, in great ire; "when you can track a stag or ride a horse with me, I may take you for my schoolmaster; till then I shall keep fast to it, that the old dog is better at a fault than the young one."

"Well, but my dear Sir Joseph—"

"Dear me no dears; am I to take all my neighbours for fools, because you choose to fancy yourself one of the wise men of Gotham? I suppose now you will tell me you don't believe there are such things as *luytons*."



"Not I, by my faith, seeing I don't even know what you mean by the word."

"A pretty fellow you are, then, to take upon yourself to read me lectures, who am old enough to be your father, when you don't so much as know what a luyton is? why, every child in the forest could tell you that a luyton is a man changed by the elves into some animal—such as a horse, or a dog, or an ass, or—"

"Stop there, my dear Sir Joseph; stop there: I believe the last clause; for as men are every day, and every hour of every day, transforming themselves into asses, I see no reason for denying the same power to your goblins."

"Deny the devil!" cried the irritated knight; "any braggadocio may be loud-tongued with the broad sun above him and his friends about him, but I would like to see how you would look with all your talk in some lone ruin by midnight."

"Very like an owl, I dare say. By-the-by, that reminds me of my wager with Cornelius and the farmer, which, to own the truth, had well-nigh slipped my memory. Since I have been dolt enough to embark aboard such a ship of fools, I must e'en make the voyage with them rather than forfeit my passage money, and be written down for a coward into the bargain."

"So, then, after all that has happened with Ashted, you really intend to pass a night in the ruins of St. Leonard?"

"Ay, marry do I, and this very night too."

"You are going before your mare to market," said the old sportsman, "but it is your own neck you risk, and therefore no one has a right to gainsay you."

"Have you no fear for me?" said Theodore, carelessly.

"Fear for you, quotha! why, man, I only pray to heaven that the elves may drub you heartily as the readiest way of taking the conceit out of your silly noddle. I have no idea, indeed, of a young fellow like yourself, who are almost a stranger to these parts, coming here to preach new ways to us foresters. Vert and venison! the road that served our fathers is smooth enough and broad enough for us, and will be so for our children if they have the sense to abide by it."

From any other than the uncle of Emily, Theodore would hardly have been disposed to take this rebuke, without giving what Shakspeare's clown styles "the reproof valiant;" as it was, he contented himself with an almost imperceptible shrug of the shoulders, and a faint smile that plainly enough denoted pity, if not contempt, for the speaker, and would have produced serious discord, had Sir Joseph been one of those quicksighted persons who meet indignities half way. Fortunately for the quiet of Pear-tree Lodge, the inaptitude of the one to see offence, however prompt to resent it when seen, made him let this pass without notice, and the deep interests of the other would not permit him to avow his sentiments more explicitly.

The time passed tardily with Theodore; he was weary of the curb thus imposed upon him, and with that furious zeal for the truth of his opinions, which belongs to all creeds, political or superstitious, and which will even descend to the matter of a pin, he was impatient to prove Sir Joseph a fool by showing the old knight that his elves existed only in his own crazy imagination. In consequence, it was early when he left Beaulieu, and the supposed hour for the spirits' appearance being yet distant he rambled on, not very curious about his road, till chance rather than purpose brought him to Souley

Pond. This humble name designates a beautiful piece of fresh water, which would have been more fitly called a lake, for it is above three miles in circumference, and in an inland county had certainly obtained the nobler appellation. The banks, though not perhaps to be compared with those of the Cumberland lakes, are yet exceedingly pleasing and romantic; they present an irregular outline, which swells up gently from the water, in some places sending out low level points of land, and in others being covered with trees that form the skirts of Beaulieu Wood.

A cold nipping wind whistled through the valley, rendered yet bleaker by the air from the pond, and the shades of evening rapidly stole over land and water. The whole looked out drearily enough from the twilight; but even this very desolation it was that lent the scene a sort of grandeur, not natural to its milder features as seen by day, the minuteness and delicacy of the details precluding any idea of the sublime; in this doubtful light, however, the parts, if not absolutely broken down and blended into a mass, had yet lost much of their distinctness; and so striking was the change thus produced, that Theodore paused to contemplate it, though, as we have seen, he was in general but little disposed to the romantic. Feelings, which he scorned at other times, began to exert their influence over him, compelling him to admit, however reluctantly, that there is a power in night and solitude that exalts the fancy while it flings the more sober reason into temporary abeyance. "I am not," he said, half aloud, "apt to be the fool of my imagination, and yet how is it? These woods and waters by daylight would not win a second glance from me, and now, when the sun is no longer upon them, I stand rooted to the spot like some dreaming poet. By my soul,—though, I would

not any one besides these oaks should hear the confession—I can forgive the visionaries who first peopled the forest with elves and the stream with mermaids, for I am sinking apace into the same belief myself; and yet it's strange, passing strange, that a man should be so much wiser by day than by night."

While he thus communed with himself, or rather with the mute scene about him, a sound of horns, mingled with the cry of dogs, the neighing of horses, and the halloo of huntsmen, burst from that part of Beaulieu wood, which lay nearest to the water. It immediately struck him that Sir Joseph had got up this midnight hunt by way of exciting his fears, and through them of punishing his credulity; but the longer he listened, the more deeply he became impressed with the growing awe of something supernatural. The music of the horn, as it rose and fell upon the night-wind, possessed an unaccountable fascination, affecting inanimate nature no less powerfully than it did himself; the breeze sank, the waves of the lake subsided into a gentle ripple, and the moon, flinging off the dark clouds which had hitherto oppressed her, shone forth in all her brightness. What was yet more wonderful, an echo answered first from one quarter, then from another, then from a third, and thus went on, leaping as it were from point to point, till it came round again to the spot from which it had started; here it appeared to concentrate itself, dwelling on a single note, but of such irresistible sweetness that he felt impelled to follow it, his breast all the while heaving, and his eyes overflowing with that delightful sadness, which shows, perhaps, the keenest touch of pleasure.

But though with every step he took into Beaulieu wood the mild melody became more and more distinct, still the huntsmen remained invisible, and

on passing one particular spot the sound again grew fainter. This was a gentle eminence, covered with furze and, more sparingly, with brushwood. On returning and pausing here, it became evident that the music proceeded from the bosom of the hill itself, gushing forth, like a fountain from the earth, in one continued stream, though the strictest search showed no appearance of any cavern, nor even so much as a fissure in the rough but unbroken green-sward. He listened in silent wonder; his colour went and came, his nostrils dilated, his heart beat that he felt its throbbing, a sense of restlessness was upon him, an uneasy craving after something—he knew not what—it might be for this invisible world, of which he was growing with every moment more intensely conscious.

The spell, for it really deserved the name, yet held him bound by its influence, when suddenly the bosom of the hill opened and out poured a train of dwarfish huntsmen, with the usual attributes of the chase, the tallest of them not exceeding the height of the child when it first toddles on the grass before its delighted mother. All were gallantly equipped in bright green, the well-known livery of the fairies, in which they glittered like so many emeralds in the ear of the swarthy night. Strange to say, the dogs and horses held no proportion with their tiny riders; they were of the full size, and Theodore recognised, or thought he recognised, in the latter, several of the most noted of his sporting friends in the forest. This, however, accorded with what he had before heard and laughed at; often had he been told that the elves were used to borrow the best hunters from the stables and ride them through the night, returning them ere daybreak, all covered with sweat and foam, and now he might see it with his own eyes. Even could he have doubted the rest, there was no

mistaking Sir Joseph's bonny bay mare, with the peculiar mark on her forehead ; and there she was, prancing and rearing, the first among the foremost, and apparently proud of her rider, who was no less than the leader of the elfin troop, and one of the most beautiful visions that ever danced his ringlets to the breeze at midnight. He, too, was in green, like the others, but his figure was loftier, his dress richer, and over his shoulders he wore a tissued bald-rick, supporting a silver hunting-horn. A plume of white feathers waved from his Spanish hat, to which they were fastened by a diamond of enormous size, that glittered in the moonbeams with almost insufferable brightness.

The elf-leader, drawing aside from his companions, reined up his horse by Theodore with the address of a practised horseman, and showed a face that, notwithstanding its exceeding beauty, bore a wonderful resemblance to the rough features of the farmer. His voice, too, when he spoke, reminded the hearer not a little of the same very ambiguous personage.

"Why, how now, friend?" he said; "abroad at this hour, when half the forest is a-bed, and the other half at the punch-bowl, or it may be at something worse? But you come to join our sport, I suppose; if so, I must needs help you into a saddle, or you are like to follow the game a-foot with the dogs, and that were harder work than rowing. Ho! Cucumber! bring this gentleman my black hunter."

The music of the horn yet rang in Theodore's ears, or it is most likely he had paused before accepting so perilous a favour. Its remembered influence was irresistible. He mounted the horse that was brought to him, and the dwarf huntsman making the woods echo again with his bugle, off they set, full gallop, with no other chase than their own

wild fancies. Still they went on—and on—and on—the horses' hoofs striking fire at every plunge, while the trees flew right and left below, and above the stars seemed to be shooting fast and giddily, till at length the whole party attained a superhuman speed; woods, hills, and houses became so blended to them by the rapidity of their flight, that every feature of the landscape lost its individual character, and the whole rolled by like a many-coloured stream reflecting the beams of sunset. Though a good horseman, it was with difficulty that Theodore maintained his seat, and, as to stopping his horse, or in any way checking his speed, that was altogether out of the question; the animal was not to be reined in, but kept his place close at the crupper of the elfin chief in defiance of the curb, stopping at nothing that came in his way, whether high or low, broad or narrow, and apparently as little fatigued at midnight as he was at starting. A hundred times Theodore was on the point of throwing himself off, preferring to risk his neck in the fall to the being whirled along at this perilous rate; and, though still restrained by some lurking dread, he would at length have tried the desperate expedient, but, in the very moment of his withdrawing his foot from the stirrup for that purpose, the bugle was again sounded, and its peculiar melody thrilled through him. Never, since the Theban walls rose at the sound of Amphion's lyre, did music work more potently; it mounted to heart and brain with the power of strong wine, till he shouted, and laughed, and roared, and played off all the fantastic tricks of one in the last degree of drunkenness.

“Hilloah! hilloah! hilloah!”

“Hilloah! hilloah!” responded the huntsman-elf, who seemed to have drunk of the same cup, for he burst forth into song as mad as his shouts, and this



was caught up by his companions, and re-echoed by the neophyte in tones that vied with the maddest and the loudest,

“Hilloah ! hilloah !  
Like the winds we go,  
Like the torrent’s shock  
From the snow-capt rock—

And through the green forest, over the sea,  
Who are so jovial, so frantic as we,  
When stars look down o’er the wave and the lea !

Hilloah, old Night !  
We’ll drink the moon’s light  
Till we’re mad outright.”

There was, however, little occasion for any of them troubling the moon on this head, and least of all for Theodore, whose intoxication of spirits was fast verging into something yet wilder. Filled with strange fury, like Atys of old, though to a less fatal end, he gave his horse the reins, flung from him his hat, tore off his coat and waistcoat, and had stripped himself yet farther would the speed of his flight have allowed him to do so.

“Halloo !” again shouted the huntsman.

“Halloo ! halloo !” was the answering cry of Theodore.

And still, as they whirled along, now in the broad moonlight, now in the deep shadow, their clamour startled something from its sleep that immediately rose and joined them.

They passed the ruins. “Halloo !” cried the horsemen, without stopping for an instant in their mad career.

“To-whit ! to-whoo !” whooped the owl ; and forth she rushed, with all her brood, and made party with them.

“Halloo ! halloo !  
To-whit ! to-whoo !



Hurry-scurry away,  
Over sward, over clay,  
Over lake, over fell,  
O'er the green billows' swell.

Loo ! loo !  
To-whoo !"

On—on—still on ! They passed the heath, they passed the village, and again swept into the forest beneath the Cadnam oak, whose green leaves whispered mysteriously to the breeze.

"Halloo !" shouted the horseman.

At the call, down sprang the wild-cat from the tree, with her nine young, screaming like mad, "Mew ! mew ! mew !" and they too joined the hunt.

"Halloo ! to-whoo !

Halloo !—mew ! mew !

Whether the stars be bright or no,  
The waves be hushed, or the wild winds blow,  
Still through the woods our chace must go.

Loo ! loo !

To-whoo !

Mew ! mew !"

On—on—still on ! through the hedges, through the brambles, through the streamlet, over stock and stone, till they came upon a green hollow that the late rains had almost reduced to a fen.

"Caw ! caw ! caw !" responded the night-crows, rising hastily from the swamp where they had been holding their midnight revels by the light of a rotten tree. They, too, flapped their black wings after the chase, and joined in the wild chorus with their own peculiar notes.

"Halloo !—To-whoo !

Caw ! caw !—Mew ! mew !

We run, we swing,

On the foot, on the wing,

With song and with shout,  
While the stars are peeping out  
In wonder at our rout."

And still they went on, their tramp and cries, as they swept by the lone cottage, making its windows rattle in the frame as if shaken by a sudden blast. At the sound, the peasant-mother would wake from sleep with a faint scream, hold her baby yet closer to her bosom till the storm died away again, and then, nestling under the clothes, commend herself to Heaven's protection, and fall asleep the sooner for her terrors.

They had now reached the banks of Southampton river, and the tide being out, before them lay the mud-lands, about half a mile in breadth, and extending the whole length of the coast, from the head of the bay up to Calshot Castle. Near the shore they were covered so thickly with sea-grass as to deceive the eye, at a distance, with the semblance of green meadows; but, farther on, the black ooze, shining in the moonlight, presented, to all appearance, an insurmountable obstacle to their progress. Theodore well knew, could the knowledge have availed him, that the slimy soil, so far from bearing the weight of a horse and its rider, would not support a man in most places, unless by the help of mud-patens, a large, flat piece of board, which the fishermen and fowlers are in the habit of tying beneath their shoes when they venture upon this uncertain soil. But the goblin crew did not allow themselves to be stopped by any such considerations. On they galloped, nor did the horses' feet leave a print upon this slimy bed; or if they did make any slight impression, it was only for the moment, the ooze filling up immediately behind them.

And now they were on the very edge of the water that rippled lazily about the horses' hoofs,

neither at ebb nor flood. But before they could tempt this new peril the cock crew thrice. At the first summons there was a general halt, as sudden as if they had all been stricken by a thunderbolt, or converted by some charm into marble statues, every horse remaining with uplifted foot and outstretched neck in the act of springing forwards. At the second, the elves began to blend with the fog from the river, their shapes becoming hideously distorted, like so many figures upon an amorphous lens; some grinned horribly with broad, moony faces, and mouths extended from ear to ear; others had the visage portentously elongated; and others again presented only the outlines of form in red, blue, green, or yellow, as it might be, quivering and flashing about like northern lights, now so intensely brilliant as to dazzle the sight, and now again faint and pale as the last star at daybreak. At the third summons they all vanished, and at the same time the horse sank from under Theodore, leaving him standing on a huge block of chalk, whether placed there by the goblins or by accident may be doubted. But however it came there, or however useful it might be as affording a temporary footing, it was plain enough to be seen that it only deferred the hour of peril; the tide must soon flow, if it had not turned already, and should it prove a spring-tide, as he much feared it would, what was then to become of him?

Urged by this fearful prospect, he desperately endeavoured to pass over the ooze, but the attempt only served to convince him of the futility of such a hope; at the very first step he was half way up to his knees in mud, and it was with no little difficulty he got back to his safer stance upon the chalk. Here he had full leisure to meditate upon the fate which it did not seem he had much chance of evad-

ing; from the hour, it was not very likely that any boat would come within hail in time to save him from the flood, for, when once it begins to rise, it rolls in upon the flat shore with uncommon speed and force, especially if, as now, the wind sets in from the west. This, however, was his only hope, and, to make the most of it, forlorn as it appeared to be, he caught up an eel-spear, which had probably been left by some boys, fixed it deeply in the slime, and, holding fast by it as a support against the weight of the rising waters, determined to make a manful struggle for his life.

By this resolution he abided unflinchingly for a time, but the cold which numbed his limbs stole gradually to his heart, and his eyes grew weary of looking out on the scene of desolation. Far and near he could find no comfort; nothing met his anxious gaze but the dim shore, which he could not reach, and a monotonous mass of waters rolling darkly in shadow, or sparkling like a sea of glass as they escaped into the moonlight.

With the approach of morning his situation became yet worse. A stiff breeze got up from the west, whose advance might be seen at a mile off, skimming along the surface, and rippling it in one broad black line, till the agitation spread from shore to shore. In a few minutes the squall grew higher. The billows lifted up their heavy heads as if they heard and answered the call of the wind, wave succeeding wave so rapidly as scarcely to allow him a sufficient respite after each attack to collect his breath for the surge that was to follow.

This did not, and indeed could not, last long. In the very height of his despair, and when he was about to yield to his fate as a lesser pain than struggling with it, he saw the upper button of his waistcoat above the water in the interval between the

rise and bursting of the billows. Distant as was the hope thus held out, it served, and in good time, to nerve him with fresh energy. A faint cry of joy burst from his chilled lips, and he clung yet faster to the eel-spear, in the hope that the ebb had come and he had deceived himself when he imagined that it was a spring tide. In a few minutes a second button becoming visible put the matter beyond a question. It was now only a battle against time, under the most favourable circumstances; the fog was clearing off as the morning advanced, and there could be little doubt of his being seen and relieved by some one of the many passing skiffs long before the next flood.

After the first half-hour the water rolled off as quickly as it had before advanced. He could again distinguish the mud-lands, over which flocks of gulls were wheeling and screaming, while the sullen cormorant, taught by a sure instinct, took up his stance apart, in expectation of the farther recession of the tide. But a sight yet more grateful tantalized him from another quarter. The sun had gradually lit up spire and tower in the misty city of Sir Bevis, and the harbour began to be alive with the bustle of a new day, sail after sail unfurling to the breeze, and the boats following or crossing each other in all directions, as they beat out from the quay, or ran before the wind. Theodore fancied he could even distinguish the faces in some of the nearer skiffs, but, immersed as he was in water, he was still unable to attract the attention of any one, and by some fatality they all tacked off to the southern side just as they came within hail, and, when they had gained the wind, shot too much ahead to see him. A chance like this, considering the usual traffic between the town and island, was hardly to have been expected; it filled Theodore with despair, which

took the stronger hold of him from his previous hopes, and in the delirium of the moment he babbled strangely to the winds and waters, and began to see green fields upon the river.

Of all the gods and goddesses, adored by ancient superstition, there is no divinity that modern reason can more easily excuse the worship of than Fortune; even those who would stoutly deny her influence if brought to the question, yet unwittingly acknowledge it when they are least thinking of such a matter, and talk of good and bad luck as things over which they have no control. Allowing the existence of this capricious deity, it must be admitted that she takes a singular delight in depressing her subjects to the lowest ebb, for no other earthly purpose, it would seem, than that of raising their wonder by pulling them out of the mire when they are sunk the deepest in it. On the present occasion this happened literally, and without metaphor. Influenced by despair, as already mentioned, Theodore leaped from his little spot of safety, and in an instant was knee-deep in the mud, without the slightest chance of extricating himself by any efforts of his own; indeed, they only seemed to fix him more firmly in the sinking soil, while the sea-gulls and the cormorants, as if sensible of his helpless situation, wheeled, screaming and whistling, about his head, and were scarce to be kept off by his faint shouts, and the yet fainter waving of his numbed and weary hands. But in what almost seemed the crisis of his fate, he was seen by a fowler, who was skimming the ooze in his mud-pattens, and, by the gun in his hand, was most probably abroad to shoot the coots and puffins.

"How the devil did you get in this mess?" said the old man, when he came up; "you have made a bad day's hovel of it, I am thinking."

"Kentish, by heavens!" exclaimed Theodore, who recognised in this metaphor a phrase in common use among the Kentish seamen, and borrowed from the hovel-boats, a sort of small craft especially employed to go out to wrecks and vessels in distress; "give me your hand, landsman, and quickly too; I am well-nigh exhausted."

"Ay, ay, I see how it stands with you; but you must be patient a bit, till I can man the capstan; one pair of hands will never be able to get you afloat again."

Off skimmed the old sailor on his mud-pattens, and in the course of half an hour, which to Theodore seemed like an age, returned with two of his companions. By their united aid the unlucky elf-scorner was finally extricated from the ooze, and led, or rather dragged to the firm land, cold at heart, but his brain on fire with the passages of the night, of which he could hardly say whether they were real, or whether his memory laboured with some parted dream as the sea will heave and roll long after the storm that shook it has passed over.

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## CHAPTER VI.

Be ever merry, ever revelling.

DECKER.

It is particularly fortunate for the avowed traffickers in fiction, no less than for the inditers of those amusing novels called histories, that, let them attribute to their characters whatever folly or inconsistency they choose, the experience of the reader,



if he chance to have seen the world, will always bear them out by a thousand parallels. This obvious truth will at once account for and excuse the conduct of Theodore, which, measured by reason, would be found to swerve a little to the bow-hand of probability. So mortified was he at the castigation his vanity had met with in the overthrow of his unbelief, and the way in which it had been accomplished, that he could not brook to face his monitors at Pear-tree Lodge, and, following the example of Cornelius, he abruptly left Hampshire.

The letter, announcing this event, found Sir Joseph and Emily at a late breakfast, full of wonder at his absence, and supposing for him all manner of accidents probable and improbable ; yet, as is usual in such cases, all of them remote enough from the truth. Nor were they made much wiser by the letter, except that from a few half-expressed ambiguous hints, it might be inferred that the writer had met with some singular rebuff at the hands of the elves in requital of his avowed contempt for them. This drew several triumphant remarks from Sir Joseph upon the presumption of youth and his own superior sagacity, after which the old knight thought no more about the matter, or only alluded to it at times when he needed some example to enforce his belief in elves and fairies. Not so with Emily ; it sank deep into her mind, and, if the impression might else have died away, it was kept alive by a series of events, which had all, more or less, a touch of the supernatural. Not the least striking among these appeals to her imagination was the singular fact that whoever pretended even indirectly to a place in her affection was sure to meet with some disaster ; either his horse flung him in the chase, or his boat upset upon the sea, or he got entangled in some absurd adventure that exposed him to general ridi-



cule, on all which occasions she could not help observing, that the farmer was sure to be a party concerned, though his agency, as in the affair of the wager, was always too remote to fix suspicion on him. Then, too, the hold he had got over Sir Joseph was not a little singular, considering the difference of their stations; for he had contrived,—by what means she could hardly tell,—but he had contrived to make himself a welcome, and it might almost be said, an indispensable guest at Pear-tree Lodge. Even she herself could not help allowing that, farmer as he was, he had more good sense, and could, when he so pleased, display more refinement than belonged to the rich land-holders around, who from rank and fortune were fully entitled in their own opinion to look down with scorn upon the humble cultivator. All this, however, did not prevent her regarding him with a secret dread, less personal to herself than to the absent Lord of the Fens; for, though she would have been puzzled to give the shadow of a reason for such belief, she did not the less feel convinced that mischief must arise from their meeting.

Thus crept on the first year, and had almost expired; but though the days naturally grew shorter, as they approached the winter solstice, to her fancy they dragged along with increasing tardiness. Her impatience for the return of the Lord of the Fens quickened in proportion to the near prospect of its arrival; the love, which had at times slumbered in her bosom amid the din of other occupations, blazing forth again into a brighter flame than ever. The great difficulty was to keep her tryste at the Cadnam Oak, which was full thirty miles off; but chance, or her own management, supplied a remedy for this in an invitation from an old aunt to pass a few weeks at Lyndhurst. She was now brought near the place of meeting, and did not fail to visit

it from day to day, though without being able to discover any signs of the promised miracle, the tree still continuing to be distinguished from those around only by its wearing a more wintry aspect ; while the withered leaves hung thickly on all the other oaks, and even clung, though sparingly, to the elms, this alone stood out bare and shivering in the wind.

If love ever reasoned or calculated, Emily might have spared herself these frequent disappointments by reflecting that it was not yet the appointed day. But she formed no exception to the maxim which holds love and reason too nearly or too distantly related for them ever to agree. The consequence was, that her patience got exhausted, and she had well-nigh resolved to abandon all hope on the subject, even before the time when in common fairness her anxieties ought to have had a beginning. "This," she said to herself, "should be her last visit to the trysting oak ; if the Lord of the Fens meant no less than he protested, and retained that meaning unaltered, he knew well, or might know, where to find her."

It might, however, be that the bitterness of the weather had its share in producing this ill-blood, for the ground was hard with frost, and the wind from the north cut through and through her as she entered upon the forest. A strong inclination to turn back, even when within sight of the oak, was checked by the broken, half-murmured song of a multitude of birds, who were harbouring in its branches, and apparently divided between some sudden cause of pleasure and the extreme coldness of the morning. On drawing nearer, with steps quickened into double speed by this unexpected music, she found the oak green with buds, and ready soon to burst into leaf,—a sight, as may be imagined, more welcome to her than if it had been dropped with diamonds. The

first part of her lover's promise being thus faithfully realized, it was fair to conclude the rest would follow, and that he was now not only close at hand, but in a day or two at farthest would keep his tryste, a conviction that made the blood rush to her cheek as if he had actually been present. But the time apparently had not yet come; like Troilus of old, in his love adventures with the fickle Cressida, she had tarried the bolting and the leavening of the meal, and still found there was the heating of the oven, and the baking, and the cooling too, before she could sit down to the banquet.

Three days had passed without making much advance in the germination of the oak, or at least much that was visible to the eye, beyond a general show of increasing greenness. On the fourth morning Emily set out later than usual, her confidence again beginning to waver from that delay which is proverbially said to make the heart sick, even in ordinary cases, where there is not the strong stimulus of love to quicken impatience, or to give an edge to disappointment. Afraid to grapple with the worst at once, she paused at the winding of the path, which would place the oak close before her, and began to calculate the probable result. This, however, was but a transient weakness. A few paces more, and, with beating heart, she saw the tree in full foliage, and the birds clustering on the spray, each tuning his peculiar note with a sweetness that, from the wintry silence of the forest, fell strangely upon the ear. It might almost have been thought that the songsters, tamed by the weather, or from some unusual impulse of their instinct, rejoiced in the presence of a human being, such a sudden burst of melody greeted her appearance; and as it gradually subsided into broken warblings, wherein sometimes one bird and sometimes another was predominant,

she caught a sound even yet more grateful to the hopes and fears that tormented her ; this was the sharp ringing of horses' feet upon the road, which every moment brought nearer and nearer. Then there was a halt, and the indistinct murmur of voices seemingly in high altercation ; and when this ceased the tramp was resumed ; but now it was the step of a single horse, and, by the deadened sound, the rider had probably turned off upon the turf. But she was not long kept in suspense. A rider came dashing through the forest at full speed, and before she had time to breathe a word of welcome or surprise, the Lord of the Fens had sprung from his horse and clasped her to his breast with all the fervour of one-and-twenty, when it loves for the first time, if, indeed, any human being can be truly said to love more than once.

"Fair and faithful, you bide tryste !" he exclaimed.

Emily blushed at this warm salute, and disengaged herself from his hold as quickly as she could ; but the rebuke of his vehemence had, at least as much affection as severity,

"Chide me not," he replied, in answer to these expostulations—"or not now, when I am come to put your love to a test, which, if it stands unaltered, it must be more deeply rooted in your heart than these old oaks are in the ground that has sustained them for so many centuries."

Emily looked earnestly at him, and read that in his troubled eye and darkening brow which told as surely of some misfortune as the black seal announces death in the family of the sender.

"In the name of heaven what has happened ? let me know the worst at once ; I can bear any thing rather than suspense."

"Emily !—dear Emily !" replied the Lord of the Fens ; "this is no longer a land for me. My know-

ledge has made me enemies among the ignorant and the malevolent, and their clamours have found a favourable hearing with those who should have shown themselves as much above the vulgar in mind as they are in station. I could, indeed, if I chose it, avenge myself upon them; I could make the poor wretches, that cry out for the stake and the fagot, dearly abye their brutal folly, but I will not; I will fly rather; and, thank heaven, the sun shines and the rain falls on other lands than this foggy island, where, if the climate be all mist and all barrenness, they are the more fitting types of the heads and hearts of the people. Yes, Emily, there are countries, rich and glowing as the East, that have not merely endured, but honoured Cornelius Agrippa, and will not, therefore, refuse a home to one who treads in the same paths, and with more good fortune. In few words, for my minutes here are numbered, will you be mine?—a priest is at hand—will you be mine, and share a splendour to which the proudest thrones of earth would show but as the glow-worm before the sunlight?"

Emily heard this question with terror no less than surprise; but then the propounder of it was the handsomest of the handsome, in form and feature a second Apollo or Antinous! He was, moreover, in peril; and to the romantic generosity of woman's nature a lover is seldom so dear as when he is out of sorts with the world, and suffering under unmerited disgrace. Though highly incensed as well as alarmed at the proposal, she did not quit him; she gave ear to his excuses and arguments; and it is with woman as with other besieged fortresses, when once the defending party begins to listen to the assailant, the hour of surrender is not far off. Still poor Emily fought a stout battle against his eloquence and the more dangerous enemy in

her own bosom. Twenty times she suffered herself to be persuaded, and as often recalled her consent ; but though the poets have chosen to paint Love as a chubby child, he is a giant in all such encounters, and more than a match for the seven cardinal virtues combined. She scolded, she wept, she sighed, and finally consented to give her hand where, in lady's phrase, she had long before given her heart. Something, indeed, she whispered against the place, as wanting the sanctity of a chapel ; but her impatient lover asked, with some show of reason, "is this noble forest, which has risen at the word of God himself, less sacred than the architecture of man?"

At a whistle from the Lord of the Fens, two servants in green liveries came from the near thicket, leading between them the old priest of Lyndhurst, who was well known to Emily. The surprise of the one party was equal to the confusion of the other at this unlooked-for meeting, and the blushes of the maiden undeceived the old man as to the character and object of those who had stopped him in the forest.

"I had thought," he said, "when these men laid violent hands upon me, that I had fallen into the hands of robbers, but now I see—"

"No violence has been, or will be done to you," interrupted the Lord of the Fens, "so it be that you comply with my orders, and join our hands in marriage without more delay. I know that you have been officiating for a friend at Hythe, and carry your book about you."

There was alarm and indecision in the old man's countenance, which he in vain endeavoured to suppress as he turned to Emily.

"And is this your wish, young lady? Only say that it is against your inclination, and trusting that heaven will not desert its servant, I will defy the

wrath of this man and his followers. No fear of what may happen to myself shall induce me to aid in an act of unlawful violence."

"For what do you take me?" said the Lord of the Fens, sternly—"for a robber, or something worse. Speak to this foolish old man, dear Emily, and convince his scruples, which relish more of the early tankard than of the wisdom which should belong to silver locks and a gray beard."

Emily faintly murmured her assent, and the priest, though with visible reluctance, went through the ceremony with no other witnesses than the two grooms, one of whom officiated as clerk, while the other gave away the lady. The Lord of the Fens would fain have remunerated him when he had concluded; but the old man briefly refused any recompense for a service rendered so much against his inclination. "I will not," he said, "make myself a party of this business by accepting fee or favour at your hands. What I have done I partly did from the dread of violence, and not less perhaps because I feared the excesses to which ungoverned appetite might lead you. Fare ye well, young people! and Heaven grant that this union, so inauspiciously, I will not say unrighteously, commenced, may have a fortunate conclusion! If an old man's blessing can avail in aught, you will both be happier than you deserve to be."

With this ominous valediction he took his leave, and the servants, at a private signal from their master, mounted their horses and rode off in an opposite direction. No sooner were they all fairly out of sight than the Lord of the Fens turned towards his bride, and, availing himself of his newly-acquired privilege, gave her a long and fervent kiss as he pressed her to his bosom.

"But we must away from this place," he suddenly

exclaimed ; and, stretching out his hand to the north, he called upon the invisible spirits in the sweetest tones of a voice at all times remarkable for its melody, yet as one who knew his power would be obeyed.

“ Night, I call thee ; let not day  
Elfin rights to earth bewray ;  
Deeper ! deeper ! deeper night,  
Till I see the stars shine bright ;  
Deeper ! deeper round about,  
Till you shut the heavens out.”

At his call the darkness came rolling on with a hollow sound like the waves of the sea, shade after shade, each deeper than the one before, till they had covered the earth with night, while above, the stars became visible though it was scarce mid-day. As the charm proceeded the darkness grew yet denser, till at length it shut out every glimmer of light, and, the forest blending into one mass, even the nearest oaks were no longer to be clearly distinguished, but loomed out from the night about them like phantom giants. Emily clung timidly to the Lord of the Fens. Still the awe that thrilled her was not unmixed with delight, as sometimes even pain, when not too acute, is known to make the nerves tingle with a sense of pleasure. Her lover felt this silent appeal to him for protection, and, replying to it with a kiss, resumed his incantation :—

“ Time, from out thy gray-worn wing,  
Feathers three and three I wring.  
Space, from off thy weary head,  
Many a lock my charm must shred.—  
Time, be nought ; and, space, then fly,  
Till in Avalon we lie.”

“ Help ! help ! ” cried Emily ; “ the ground is sliding from under me.”



"Fear not," said the Lord of the Fens; "am I not with you?"

His voice supported her not less than the strong grasp of the arm that held her up, though her brain was reeling. Dark as it was, she fancied she could see a continued flitting and changing of the things around, and at one time it seemed to her that she heard the roaring of the ocean; so close and clear was the sound that she shrunk from the expected billow, which apparently rolled by her and burst in the distance. This lasted for several minutes, and when it ceased the gliding motion also ceased, and faint lines of gold and fire streaked the darkness or rather shone through it, like the moonbeams through a broken cloud. Suddenly it was day. Instead of the wintry forest she had last seen,—but a few minutes ago as it appeared to her,—she looked upon a summer landscape, where the spirits of the east and west seemed to have met and shaken hands in gentle rivalry. If the green meadows and deep blue skies bore witness to the presence of the west, the spicy air, the brilliant flowers, the gay plumage of the birds, varying through all the tints of the rainbow, gave ample token that the east too had made her home there. But yet more beautiful, if any thing could be more beautiful, was the crystal palace in the midst of this delicious country. The chameleon itself does not change into so many and so brilliant colours; at one moment the sunbeams glanced and flashed from column, wall, and cupola, with such intolerable brightness that the eye could not dwell upon the building; in the next, the whole mass would soften into green or blue, and again it would glow with the richest vermilion.

For some moments the Lord of the Fens forebore to interrupt the speechless wonder of his bride, finding as much, if not more, pleasure in gazing on

her features, animated as they were by delight, than she herself did in looking on this magic landscape. Soon, however, he grew jealous of so much of her attention being diverted from himself, although to inanimate objects.

"Well, dear Emily," he said, "how like you your home? for all this calls you mistress."

"Beautiful! most beautiful!" murmured Emily in reply.

"Mine own sweet bride! that I have pleased you would more than repay any labour, though it had been the uplifting of the hill which they tell us was laid on the giant Titan. Could I fancy aught beyond this fairy garden, by the moon when she is brightest it should not long be wanting."

Emily thanked him with a smile of grateful love, and a smile in the first half of the honeymoon will requite any service.

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## CHAPTER VII.

Unlock my hand,  
For thou art death.

THE INDIANS.

THE attentive reader will easily have discovered, from the oath by which he bound himself, that the Lord of the Fens was no other than his old acquaintance, Puck. He had chosen Mona for his abode, once the Avalon of the fairies, though long since deserted by them, and inhabited by the dark and malicious salamanders, who, abhorring all community with the more ethereal spirits, had yet been glad, like the soldier-crab, to take up the shell that

had been thus abandoned by their powerful neighbours. These Puck had found no great difficulty in driving out; and, having restored the island to its original splendour, had girt it round, by means of a perpetual fire, with a fine blue mist that rendered it invisible to the passing voyager. But, with all his power, there was one miracle he could not achieve; he could not exclude ennui from this terrestrial paradise. In a few months, Emily found that something was wanting to her happiness, though, in the abundance of enjoyment placed at her disposal, she was puzzled to find a name for the deficiency. It was neither gold, nor dress, nor pleasure in its many forms, since all these she had at command. What then was it? She could not tell herself, and in the absence of Puck, whom she still only knew as a Rosicrucian, the spirit of weariness seemed to have infused a double portion of her poppies into all around. He had quitted Avalon, as he always did, on the first of every new moon, sometimes for a shorter sometimes for a longer period, leaving Emily the unrestrained mistress of the island. But, if we may be allowed to borrow a quaint, yet not unapt illustration, this pure essence, as it were, of pleasure distilled and sublimated from all pain, like too rich a perfume, is often more than the brain can bear; a little less sweet had been much sweeter; and as she gazed on the unchanging calm above, below, and around, she began to think that even a storm might have its advantages.

Her thoughts, though not uttered, had evidently found an interpreter, for in the midst of these reveries a little old woman of cheerful aspect, yet deformed shape, made her appearance from the orange grove close by, and without further ceremony, abruptly began with, "I can show you the cure, my pretty mistress."

Emily started in as much surprise at the unexpected vision of age and ugliness amid these gardens, as in any other part of the world would have been shown at the appearance of some transcendent beauty.

"Who are you?" she said; "and what is it you propose to cure?"

"What do I propose to cure?" reiterated the crone, laughing and shaking her crutch good-humouredly at the maiden—"your head that aches for what it *has* enjoyed, and your heart that aches for what it *would* enjoy. Yes, yes, I know where the shoe pinches, and can help you too."

"And who are you? how did you get into this island? You cannot be one of my attendants."

"Very true," replied the old crone; "I am no bondswoman; but I am not the less ready to serve you, as who would not, that had once looked on your bright eyes and beautiful face. Ah! he is a happy man who may kiss that rosy mouth when he pleases, and no one cry shame for the matter."

Emily blushed, yet could not help smiling, better pleased with this coarse flattery than she was willing to admit, even to herself; and when she chided the beldame it was in tones that belied her words.

"You take strange liberties, my good friend. It would be better, if your object is to gain any favour from me, that you should speak out plainly and honestly."

"The words of an old woman cannot hurt you, pretty one," replied the crone; "were I a handsome young cavalier, indeed, it might be a different thing;—would I were, for your sake! for, by my life,—though that's hardly worth swearing by—I have never seen so fair a face; and yet in my time I have looked on beauty that has set the brains of men in a ferment—ay, till they have poured out

their blood, as if it had been so much water, but to win a smile from it. Pity such lovely blossoms should be no more proof against wind and weather than such a poor, old, withered creature as myself! Ah, well-a-day!—it is on that foot you halt, too, my pretty mistress.”

“How mean you by that?” said Emily; “I understand you not.”

“Like enough, like enough,” replied the old woman; “the sick seldom know their own disorder; it is the wise physician who must expound the symptoms and prescribe the remedy. The fever that scorches up your blood, making your days long and your nights longer, is the thirst for immortality; the craving after other and higher senses is upon you, and every hour your enjoyment of the present will grow less, till at last you sink into just such another useless thing as I am, detesting the earth, and yet afraid to leave it.”

“Suppose all this were so; I see no way to better it.”

“Like enough, like enough,” said the old woman; “but I, who found the disease, know the cure—and will show it too, in the hope that you will requite me with as good a turn when I shall ask it.”

“No blind promises,” said Emily, hastily; “I pledge myself to nothing before I know its object, and, when I do, it may be I shall be just as little inclined to gratify you.”

“Well, well,” replied the crone; “I will show you where the fountain of immortality lies, and take the chance of what may follow. The cave is not far off.”

Curiosity and the want of other occupation, rather than any particular faith in the promised sight, induced Emily to follow the old woman, who hobbled along with more speed than might have been ex-

pected from her appearance, and led the way to the foot of a near mountain. Here she stopped amid a cluster of rose-bushes, and, pushing them aside with her crutch, showed the entrance to a cavern, that apparently went deep into the bowels of the earth.

"This is the mouth of the grotto," she said; "it is dark at first, but when you have gone a little way you will find it bright as the hills at noon. Follow me, child."

But Emily, though strongly urged by curiosity, liked not the darksome entrance. She suffered her guide to go in without moving a step; and the old woman, seeing she was not followed, turned back to know the cause.

"Well, child, what do you stop for? Surely you are not afraid of walking a few yards in the dark?—though quite dark it is not, for even my poor eyes can pick the way without much stumbling."

"It may all be as you say," replied Emily; "and, if it is, I am curious to learn why one who knows the road so well has not drunk of the fountain herself."

"Ah, daughter—for I may call you so in respect to our ages—that is but a simple question; would you have me perpetuate wrinkles, and give immortality to the pains and achings in these crazy old bones? No, no, child; threescore years and odd are not so light a burthen that woman, or man either, should wish to bear them a moment longer than needs must be. Had I known of this grotto when I was young and beautiful as yourself—you laugh, little one, but there was such a time, I promise you; there was a day when I had bright eyes and sunny looks, and a face that brave cavaliers have crossed the sword for; but that's all past with me now; my eyes have waxed dim, my locks gray, and my face—ah, well! it's no use talking; I cannot help my-

self now, but I may help you, and I will, too, if you have only sense and spirit enough to walk by my counsel."

In the beldame's withered face Emily saw her future self as in a mirror; and the idea of age, which probably had never before troubled her mind for a single instant, now burst upon her with as much vividness as if there had been only a single day between her present youth and the wrinkles of seventy. It will hardly then excite surprise if she at once subdued her scruples and followed the old woman into the cavern, which, after all, contained nothing very alarming. The outer cave terminated in a second that was lit up by a faint glimmering, enough to show its sides of a rough red stone, while its extreme end was singularly formed by what might be termed a wall of clouds, that were unceasingly rising from the earth and passing off again through the roof, far too lofty to be seen in the imperfect twilight.

"But where is the fountain?" asked Emily, who saw no outlet.

"Follow me," said the old woman, with her usual good-humoured smile; and walking forward into the cloudy mass, as if it had been no more than a dense fog, her figure became partially obscured.

Thus encouraged, Emily did not hesitate to follow, and in a few minutes found the cave she had just left completely shut out from view, while before her was still the same mass of vapour.

As they advanced the veil grew thinner, and the light stronger in proportion from the third and inmost cavern, which they now entered. This was a place of immense extent; the walls, the floor, the roof, even the columns that supported it, all were formed of ice, or of what seemed to be ice, gleaming with a cold blue light, or here and there bright-



ening into the fairest tints of vermillion. From the loftiest of these masses a thin stream trickled with almost imperceptible motion into a brook below, so calm that not a ripple broke its surface. By the side of this sat the genius of the place, who might have been cut out of marble for any stir of life that there was in his limb or features, which were deadly pale, while his eye was fixed, cold, and glassy. The influence of this figure, even more than of the place, struck a chill to Emily's heart ; but the old woman's "Fear not, my child,—fear not, my pretty mistress," acted with the force of a charm in restoring her to herself.

"Genius of the cold waters," said the crone, "I have here brought thee one who thirsts for immortality. Give her to drink."

The genius rose from his ice-throne, and held out a chalice over the brook ; but still no feature stirred, no sound followed his steps, and his action altogether had not the motion of life about it. In an instant, the water rose up in a fountain from the stream below, and in its fall soon overflowed the cup, which he presented to his youthful visitant, saying, in tones as deep and solemn, yet as passionless, as the bell that speaks the hour of midnight, "Drink !"

It was neither an injunction nor a request that sounded in this monosyllable ; but though Emily shuddered at it, she did not refuse the chalice. She drank, and the empty goblet fell from her hands.

"Father of heaven !" she exclaimed, "I am dying."

"Yea !" replied the genius, in the same toneless voice ; "didst thou not ask for immortality ? and how should the perishable become imperishable, except it pass through the gates of death ?"



Emily clasped her hands in despair, and turned to reproach her treacherous guide, but the wolf had already cast its disguise; instead of a beldame bowed with infirmities, the sullen gnome stood before her, the chief of those whom Puck had expelled from the island, his swarthy features scowling with malignant triumph, while his form, glancing like the darkest copper, flung a sickly yellow light upon the floor, such as the sun throws on the earth when partially eclipsed.

He had little time, however, to enjoy his triumph, when the ice-walls were rent asunder with the roar of an avalanche, and through every fissure poured in the fairies, numerous and sparkling as the dew-drops on the moonlit meadow. Puck was the foremost. With one bound he cleared the space between him and the gnome, and felled the sullen spirit to the earth; but in the act of repeating the blow, he saw that Emily was sinking, and rushed forward to support her.

"Emily!" he exclaimed, in tones that might have softened any heart that had not been made of adamant. But of such material was the gnome's, or something harder; for the sight of the dying girl delighted him into forgetfulness of his own peril.

"Ay, groan on! groan on!" he said; "your toy is broken; do all you can, the idol of your heart will soon be more loathsome than the foulest of living things, though it were the toad or the blood-swollen spider."

"Malignant fiend!" exclaimed the fairy—"but you shall yet curse this deed you so much glory in, and yourself for having done it. Away with him, to the north! the farthest north!—fix him in the ice that binds the pole, and there let him for ever howl to the winds, while the fierce cold gnaws like a vulture at his heart."

The gnome was borne off by the elves, while, without losing a moment, he cleaved the cavern with his beloved one, and placed her full in the glow of the setting sun. But no sun could impart warmth to those pale features, though a faint smile passed over them upon her recognising the Lord of the Fens, which she failed to do at first in the mist that gathered over her eyes.

"You come late, William," she said, in a voice so low and fine as to be almost inaudible—"I fear, too late."

"Too late, indeed!" sighed the spirit, half aloud; but the exclamation was involuntary. "Oh that I had crossed the path of the false gnome but an hour earlier!"

In the bitterness of his heart he could have put forth his strength, and with a word reduced the whole island to a desert, for its very beauty was now detestable to him; the rich light, the deep calm, the silent happiness of inanimate nature, all formed too painful a contrast with his own feelings; even the happy buzzing of the bee as it winged past was gall to him, but he compelled himself to outward calm at least, though the fair burthen grew heavier and heavier on his arm with every moment. "I must not," he said to himself, "I must not do aught that may make death more bitter than it is to my poor Emily."

There was a deep pause, during which the eyes of the dying girl wandered restlessly around, when on a sudden they fixed upon some object, and she started from his arms with unlooked-for energy, exclaiming, "What is that?"

"The shadow of the beech-tree," replied the spirit, sighing.

Again she fell back upon his arm, and murmured

"The shadow of the beech-tree! ay, all is shadow now.—But hark! I hear a voice—hark!"

"It is the song of the wind among the leaves."

"It is Death!" said Emily, and her eyes kindled with momentary fire—"it is the bald sexton, Death—he that keeps open house night and day, summer and winter. Do you not hear his song, and see him shake his glass at me?"

And she sang the imaginary strain as only the dying can sing—

"Come away, come away,  
I have made your bed of clay;  
Raven from the beech-tree croaks,  
Owlet murmurs from the oaks;  
You have nothing more to do  
With the earth, nor earth with you.  
Come away, come away!—

"But why," she cried, suddenly breaking off, "why do you look so earnestly towards the setting sun?—Ah me! it will rise again to-morrow, and all will be so happy in its light!—poor Emily!"

Her senses were evidently beginning to wander. She played with her white robe, talked incoherently of the New Forest as if she were even then lying beneath the Cadnam Oak, and soon ceased to recognise the Lord of the Fens, though her thoughts were plainly enough with him. Taking from her bosom a small rose-branch, on which the buds had not yet unfolded themselves, she murmured, "He will come when they blow—he promised me—green, green—no flower yet."

With a trembling hand she pulled off the buds one by one. As the last fell, she breathed a gentle sigh, and her head dropped back upon his arm, her long light tresses flowing to the ground. The sun, which seemed to have waited for that moment, emerged

from the clouds, flashed a transient blaze of light upon her face, and then dropped below the horizon.

"Emily! Emily! dear Emily!" cried the spirit, his voice rising with each repetition of the beloved name, till it reached the wildest notes of passion; "so young! so beautiful! and art thou dead?"

He laid the corse gently on the ground, and knelt beside it in utter despair, while the elves, who had hitherto kept at a distance, now grouped about, but respected his sorrow too much to break in upon it by words. The sylphs, too, floated down from the upper air, and the mermaids rose from their blue waters to join the melancholy circle, for the tricky spirit was generally idolized by his companions of the various elements. But Puck, either unconscious of their presence, or else indifferent to it, remained with his eyes still fixed upon the beautiful dead, though by this time the moon had risen. A moth settling on her white dress was the first thing to interrupt the current of his feelings. He hastily brushed away the troublesome insect, and addressed the pale form before him, as if it still were capable of hearing him.

"This is no longer a place for you, dear Emily—I must lodge you where corruption and her loathsome brood cannot come near to break your slumber."

"Be that my care," said the nixy-queen, who now thought it high time to interfere; "I will enclose the fair mortal in amber, and lay her deep, deep in the crystal rock that supports the ocean, where the worm creeps not and the moth cannot fly to injure her."

Puck looked at the speaker, but made no reply, and the naiad, who sympathized with his distress, gave a sign to her companions.

It was a piteous, and yet a beautiful sight, when

these young and lovely creatures raised on their crossed hands one not less young or lovely than themselves, to commit her to the silent grave. The nixy-queen herself supported the head, and the tear trembled in her eye as she looked on the pallid face with its smile so sad ! so exquisitely sad !—life has nothing like it ; we gaze and gaze till we fancy the dead must yet be sensible of sorrow.

They moved along, not with the step of mortal mourners, but like shadows floating across the green when the thin summer-clouds are driven before the wind. As they glided on, their voices joined in a wild and plaintive melody, that filled the passing mariner with fears for himself and for his goodly bark that was beating off the shore in the moonlight.

“All is not right,” said the pilot. “Saint Nic’las be our speed, or here are two-score of us will never see home again !”

“Amen !” said the old seaman who stood at the wheel.

“Amen ! amen !” responded the crew—and many a brave heart beat with a woman’s fears as it breathed a prayer to be delivered from evil, and many a gray head was laid that night upon a sleepless pillow.

## L'ENVOI.

## THE RIDDLE SOLVED.

Come, frolic youth, and follow me,  
 My frantic boy, and I'll show thee  
 The country of the fairies.

DRAYTON.

IT was a lovely midsummer's night, and the soft quiet light of the moon had blended the woods, the rocks, the rivers, and even the skies themselves, in a wondrous sort of harmony. One might almost have fancied that the spirits of earth and air were holding a loving communion, as the waters murmured, and the winds whispered, and the trees gently waved their branches to and fro, uninterrupted by a single sound of human life. Nature was alone with her children of the hill and forest, and oh! how beautiful is she in such an hour!

But on a sudden it was as if every flower and every blade of grass threw off its dew-drops, which then shot athwart the meads, glittering, crossing, mingling, and in the next minute the green sward was covered with troops of fairies. It was like the bees on a summer's day, clinging and buzzing about a bed of roses.

Oberon and Titania were in one of their happiest moods, for the king was all obedience, and his tiny queen was all gentleness and affection. They talked, they laughed, they sang, they danced, while the stars from the spangled sky twinkled down upon them with smiles of love.

The dance was over, and the golden cowslips waved merrily to and fro with the weight of the recumbent fairies. Oberon looked long and kindly into the eyes of Titania; he saw himself reflected there.

"How say you, mine own Titania; shall we rouse the humble-bee from his lair and chase him through the fields of moonlight?"

"Not so," replied the queen, languidly; "I am weary of the chase, and shall be for a month to come."

"Shall we then visit the winter-bed of the swallow, or the cavern of the winds?" said Oberon—"or shall we drive through the unfathomed waters, and admire the wondrous and eternal springs of ocean?"

"Talk not of them," replied the humorous Titania,—“my wings faint, my blood runs chill at the very mention of those icy regions.”

"Will you down then to the house of sleep, and see the dreams rehearse their pageants for to-morrow night? Even our world has nothing half so beautiful as their fancies."

"Methinks," answered Titania, "I would rather you should sing, and the human mortal, as he passes, shall fancy he is listening to the music of the spheres."

And again King Oberon was all loving duty and obedience—

#### OBERON'S SONG.

"What's the music sweetest creeping,  
On the ear when day is sleeping?  
'Tis some loving maiden's sigh  
When 'tis breathed she knows not why,  
Or the playful Echo's mock  
Babbling from the hill or rock.

“What to fairy’s eye seems sweetest  
When the hours are passing fleetest?  
’Tis the smile, the frolic wild,  
Of some fair and mortal child,  
Ere its heart has learned to know  
Earthly sin or earthly wo.

“Answer, Echo, from thy mountain,  
Every whisper of the fountain;  
Sigh on, nymph, yet know not why;  
Light, babe, on thee slumbers lie;  
Lovely, lovely things of clay,  
Oberon grieves ye pass away.”

As Oberon sang, the spirits of inanimate nature seemed to sympathize with the delicious melody; the fountains fell in a lighter spray; the rivulets flowed more gently; the leaves ceased to murmur in the midnight breeze; and the flowers that were sleeping with closed cups or folded buds, half opened them to the music as it floated by them. — But Titania—alas the while!—she was less musical than all around her, or perchance had slept less; for she fairly gaped, and in vain attempted to hide the odious fact by placing her hand before her mouth. The king saw it, and his brow darkened, while his voice grew hoarse from vexation. His loving lady instantly amended her error by covering his lips with kisses, which at once put an end to his song and his ill-humour—a degree of indecorum not to be tolerated among earthly queens, but perfectly allowable in Elfin-land. For my part, I think the elves are in the right.

While they were in this happy mood, the sprites gambolled around as usual in the meadows for their own amusement or that of their royal master and his consort. Some plucked the hempen stalks, and metamorphosed them into horses, on which they careered in mimic tourney, or chased one another across the greensward; the passer-by, who had



seen the grass bend beneath their invisible footing and then spring up again, would have thought the west wind had been sweeping athwart the waving herbage. Others made war with the shining beetle, and despoiled him of his wings, which they afterwards fashioned into greaves and breast-plates, that glanced and glittered with a deep blue light in the moonbeams. Others again, headed by Cricket, a sprite of name and rank in Faërie, amused themselves by making an attack upon a neighbouring orchard, where the apples hung in clusters, and chirped all the time with infinite glee,—

“ Stolen waters ay are sweetest ;  
Stolen minutes ay are fleetest ;  
Stolen kisses, when the light  
Hovers dim 'twixt day and night ;  
Stolen junkets o'er the fire,  
Ere the glimmering ash expire ;  
Stolen draughts, when none are nigh  
Midnight's merry pranks to spy ;  
Stolen apples, in our noon,  
Pulled beneath the silent moon ;—  
All are sweeter for the theft :  
To your work then, spirits deft ;  
Steal through night, the thief of day,  
'Till we steal ourselves away.”

And then there was such a plucking and munching of apples, and flinging them at one another as though they had been so many Venetians showering comfits at a Carnival ! It would have gladdened any one's heart to have seen them, except perhaps the owner of the orchard.

A fifth party tripped hand in hand in merry circles ; and where they danced a ring was left as if the grass had been burnt, which plainly betrayed to the morning the secret of their elfin sports.

Some were more mischievous in their frolics. Incubus, the cousin of Puck, and a humble imitator

of his pranks, played off a thousand mad tricks ; he was a bear, he was a dog, he was a lion, he was a spotted pard, and anon in the likeness of a cracker he tumbled among the dancers, bouncing and sparkling, to the infinite damage of many a green vestment. Then he took upon him the form of a young colt, and in this shape set off full trot to a black steed, that was quietly grazing on the near downs ; a whole bevy of sprites followed, shouting and laughing, to witness the interview between the two quadrupeds, much as a set of schoolboys would hurry to a fray between two of their companions. The meeting was exceedingly gracious. Colt-Pixy, the Hampshire name for the goblin thus disguised, wickered or neighed ; the horse wickered in return ; they then rubbed their noses most lovingly upon each other's necks, and they whickered again, then they played off a few graceful flourishes with their hinder feet, and away they both bounded across the meads till they came to a quagmire, whose treacherous green surface told nothing of the springs below. The elf passed lightly enough ; not so the poor horse ; souse he went into the mire, sinking in an instant up to his very ears, amid the shouts of the delighted goblins.

Seated under a canopy, formed of the eyes of peacocks' tails, while a dozen elves fanned from them the busy gnat, Oberon and Titania seemed to enjoy the various pranks of their frolicsome lieges ; but now a stranger, an ignis fatuus, was seen hopping towards them in as straight a line as his zigzag nature would allow him to assume.

"A messenger from the gnomes, no doubt," cried Oberon, stretching out his lily sceptre ; and in an instant the reign of mirth was past, and the reign of etiquette succeeded. The courtiers ranged themselves in their proper places around the monarch ;

the lady says no longer giggled; the counsellors strove might and main to look sagacious; and the ushers of the various rods, blue, green, red, and yellow, threw themselves up stiff and starched as if they had swallowed their own wands of office.

The Will-o'-the-Wisp had by this time approached within a few hundred yards of the throne, and then it seemed as if he had no mind to come any nearer, for there he remained, hopping backwards and forwards, right and left, but carefully avoiding to cross a certain boundary.

"Bid him draw nigh," said the king; and instantly all the rods, blue, green, red, and yellow, were in motion, marching with stately steps and slow towards the Wisp, who now stood still, and seemed to expect what was to come next.

"Approach!" said the blue rod.

Mr. William hopped off to the right, where he of the green staff arrested his farther progress by a similar mandate,—*"Approach!"*

The recusant Wisp made a sudden jump backwards.

"Approach!" cried the red and yellow rods simultaneously.

By these various evolutions the divers wands of office formed a bristling circle about Mr. Wisp, when—presto! he bounded over them all, and knelt at the feet of Titania—It was Puck!

A general shout from all sides welcomed back the merry spirit, and even the queen condescended to smile graciously upon him. As for Oberon, he was in perfect ecstasies at the return of his favourite to Elfin-land.

"Now, by the brightness of the moon!" cried the delighted monarch, "the first snow-drop were not more welcome. Thou hast tarried long among

the human mortals—so long we almost deemed thou hadst forgotten us.”

“But have you found my riddle?” asked the queen.

“If there be truth in woman,” replied Puck boldly.

“Ahem!” said the queen; “let us hear your solution of the secret, however.”

“An please your majesty, it is no secret,” cried Puck with a sarcastic smile; “it is a truth that grows like the blackberry, open on all the hedges.”

“Speak it then;” said the queen; “and look that your answer abide the touch, or your exile from the court is like to be a long one.”

There was a dead silence for a few seconds while Puck collected his courage, or, what was more probable, calculated how far he might with safety to himself indulge his love of mischief by satirising the queen. Apparently he saw something in her eye that bade him beware, for he looked down again with a wondrous affectation of humility. As to the courtiers, though the race is proverbial for long ears, there was not one on the present occasion who would not gladly have added an ell to them had it been possible, that he might the better catch the gist of Puck’s reply—and thus it was :

“Pleasure? woman loves it well,  
For she was not made for the hermit’s cell;  
Gold? it sparkles in her eyes,  
And it grows more bright as youth’s morning flies;  
Love? she is the soul of love,  
’Tis her heaven below and her hope above;  
But none of these  
Can woman please  
Like——”

“Like what?” asked the queen, impatiently, seeing Puck hesitate—“like what?”

“ Speak without fear, friend Robin,” said the king, in an encouraging tone.

Fear!—the rogue was only too much at his ease all the time, chuckling inwardly at the eager impatience of his listeners. But he was soon weary of his demure part. Springing up from the ground and pirouetting for several minutes like a new-spun top, to the sore astonishment of the simple-minded monarch, he started off into another strain—

“ Be she young, or be she old,  
Warp'd, or formed in beauty's mould,  
Be she widow, wife, or maid,  
By whatever temper swayed,  
Woman's master passion still,  
Is—to have her sovereign will.”

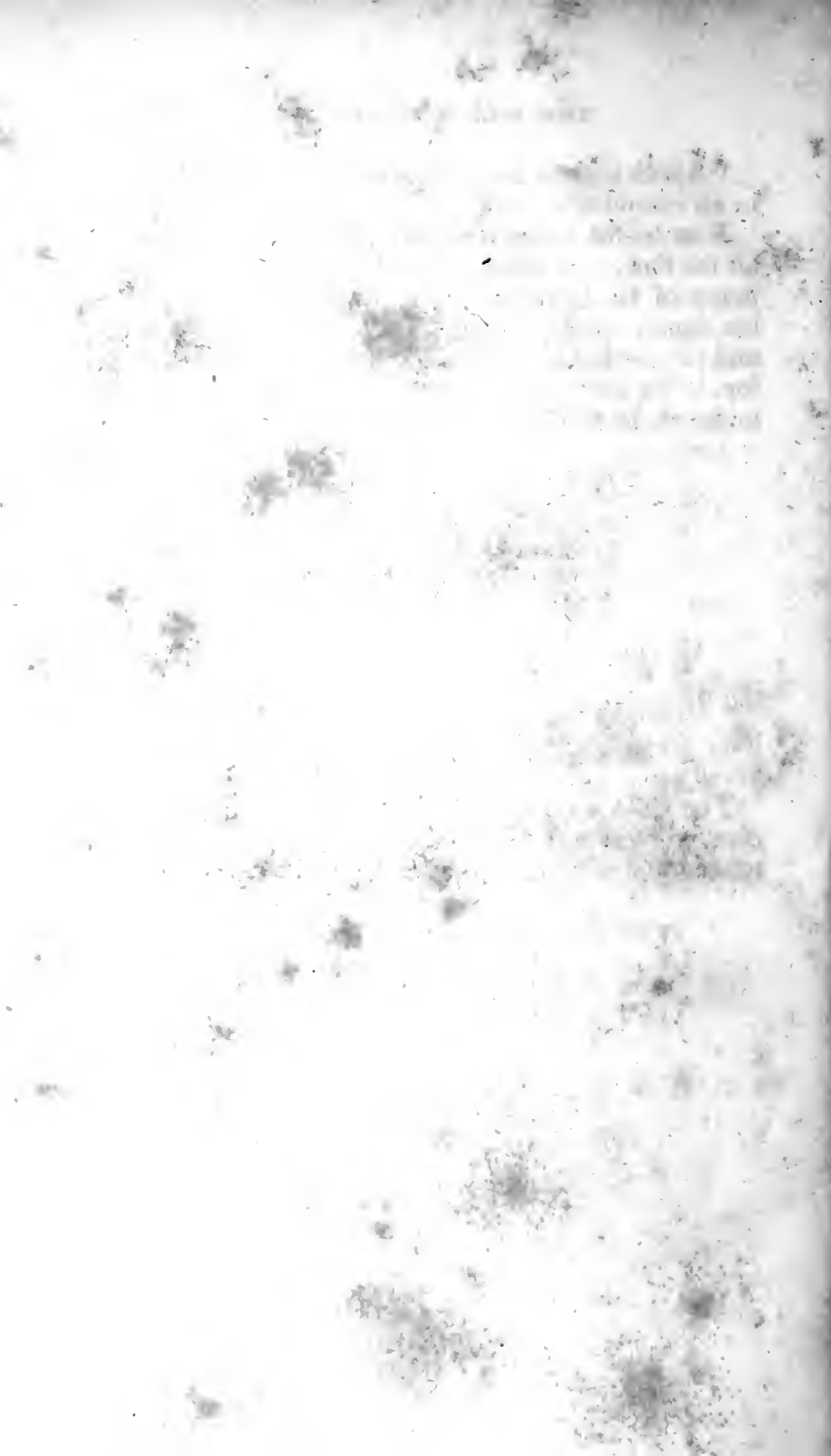
“ He has found my riddle,” said the queen, smiling.

“ Methinks he needed not have travelled far or long for it,” exclaimed the king, with unwonted gravity.

The elves around tittered ; the tricksy spirit for once wore as solemn a face as his anointed lord and master, and—

THE FROLICS OF PUCK WERE OVER.

THE END.



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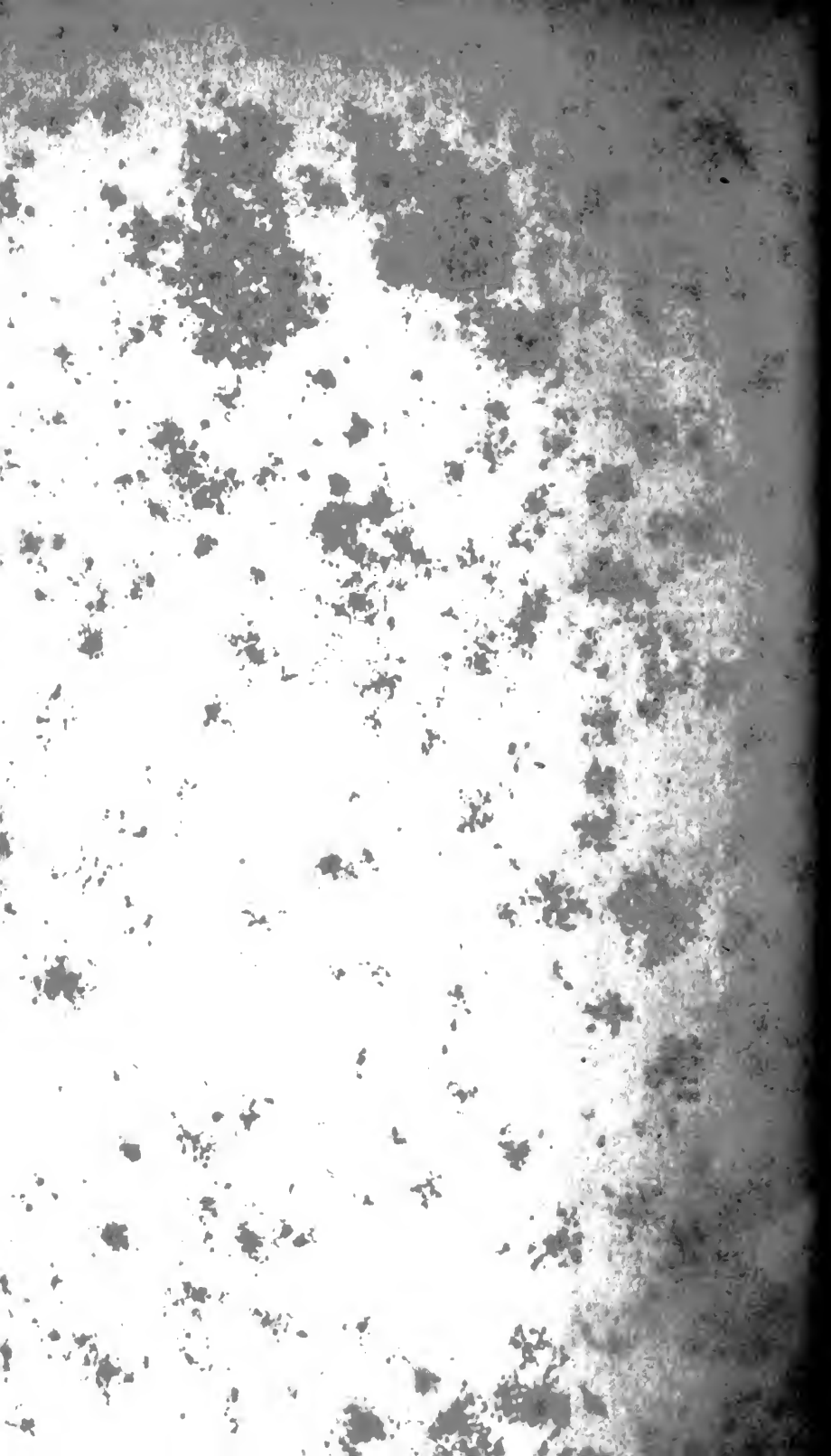
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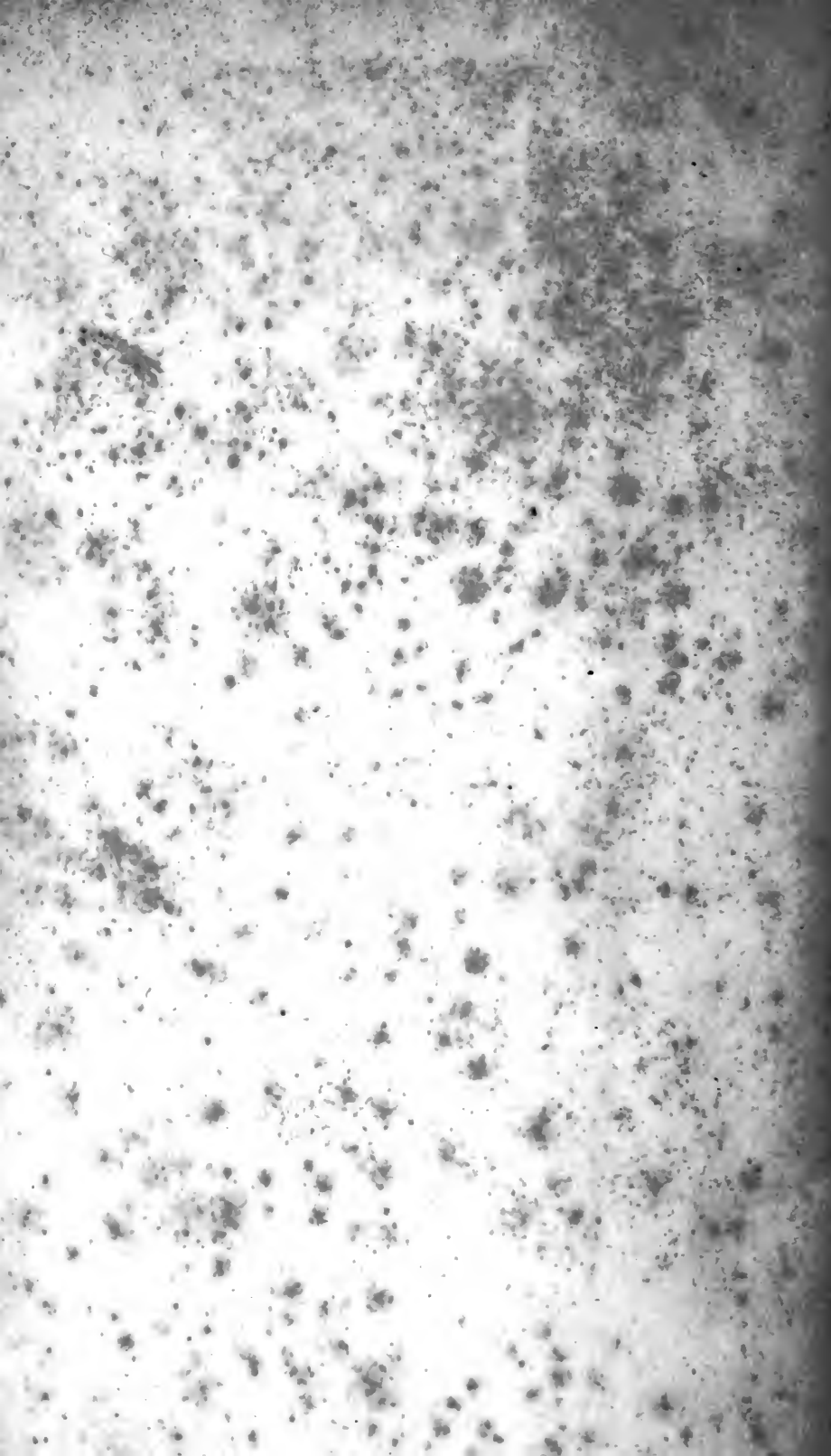
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